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Love Stories of the American Girl

Dec. 13

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by Winifred Carter

Ethel Donoher's

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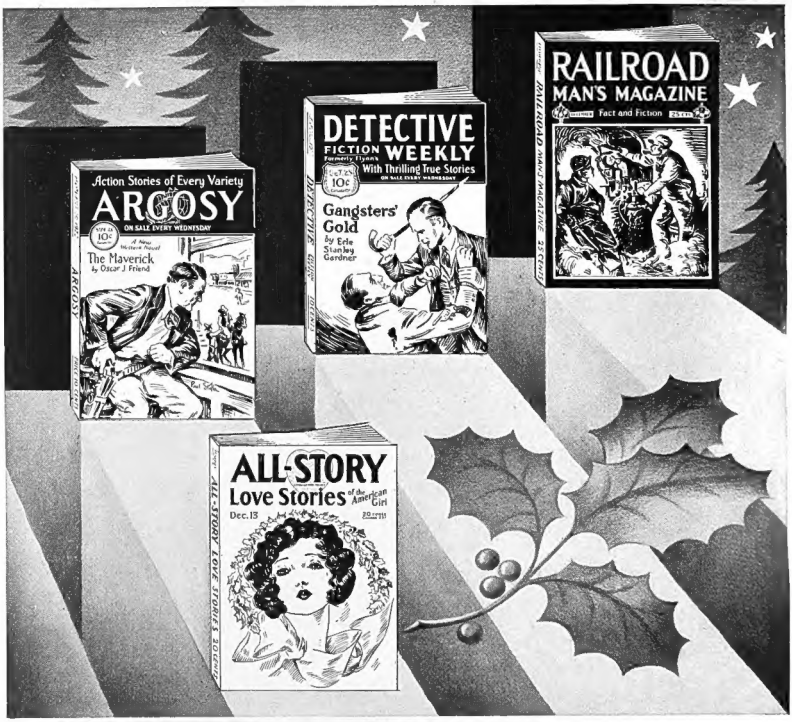

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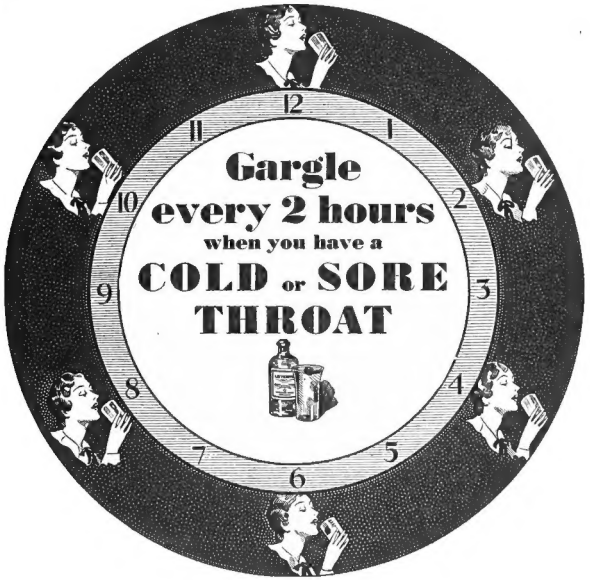

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Volume VIII—No. 4 *Love Stories of the American Girl* December 13, 1930

Novelettes:

A Christmas Wooing — Winifred Carter — 481
Jilted — Judith MacKay — 575

Short Stories:

Castaway at Christmas — Ethel Donoher — 516
Twice Promised — Maud McCurdy Welch — 530
Her Other Love — Daisy Dalrymple — 543
Her Rival From Paris — Evan Sands — 596
"Little Lost Sweetheart" — Helen Franklin — 609
The River of Love — Florence Elenora Goodrich — 615

Serials:

The Love He Scorned (In Four Parts—Part I) — Justine Beverly — 497
A Legacy of Hate (In Two Parts—Part II) — Betty Trevor — 560

Features:

Planets of Destiny — Carol Young — 623
Handwriting and Happiness — John Fraser — 627
Heart-to-Heart — Agnes Merion Morton — 631
The Lonesome Club — Dorothea Dale — 636

Verse:

Xmas Worshipper — Alice Milburn — 529
Rain Memory — Dorothy Ann Blank — 542
Illusive Content — Josefa Picard — 559
Paradise — Eliot Kays Stone — 614
The Gleam — Elizabeth Chisholm — 574
Gifts — Edgar Daniel Kramer — 595
Moon of Romance — Mary Carolyn Davies — 608

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The band stopped and the ice was cleared for the contest

A Christmas Wooing

By WINIFRED CARTER

ALEC CARR'S black brows were drawn together as his Lincoln sped along the frosty roads. He drove fiercely, trying to exorcise the demon in his breast. Venetia's dark, magnetic loveliness kept coming before him; his longing for her was well-nigh unbearable. And then the recollection of his brother's broken-hearted letter came, too.

Returning from abroad, he had expected to see his brother, Teddy, who had promised to meet him. Instead, Teddy had left home on the very eve of his return. Queer, that! Teddy was always a man of his word. It had puzzled Alec, until he met Venetia Trent.

After that Teddy and everything else faded. For she was lovely, like some tropical flower with her smooth, creamy pallor, and great black-lashed eyes—eyes that were sometimes purple, sometimes black, and the scarlet of her mouth. The man, just back from the wilds, had fallen in love. And then somebody let out the truth. It was at a dinner party; two men near him were discussing her.

"Lovely girl, but utterly heartless. You remember that nice boy, Teddy Carr? She thought he was rich. Got

a shock when she learned the truth, and the poor lad got a shock, too. She jilted him at once."

The men drifted away.

Alec had had a shock, too. He had faced Venetia with it.

"I was never engaged to Teddy," she said. "I wanted more of a man."

She had tried to nestle in his arms, but Alec drew away. Could he believe her? No! He loved her, but he wasn't so far gone as that. The Carberrys had invited him to join their house party in the Poconos, and he was fleeing to them from temptation. There were still a few weeks before Christmas, and then he would set off on his travels again.

He brought the great car to a standstill. Nothing but snow, he thought ruefully, as he climbed out and looked around for a signpost. Five miles back he had been told to turn at the crossroads, but with the snow covering the landscape it was difficult to know whether he had passed the turning.

And then he caught his breath, the scene was so marvelous. Snow-clad mountains, rising sheer into the frosty blue, and an ice-covered lake in a bowl at their feet. And something else, too. A girl—oh, such a girl! She stood poised like some Russian dancer on the points of her skates, and then she was off; round the lake she raced, cutting eights, gliding, swooping, swerving like an ice bird, as graceful as a swallow.

She did things with skates that he had not dreamed were possible, and he was no novice. Indeed, Mrs. Carberry's invitation had been attractive mainly because of the skating she promised.

He hoped that this girl was one of the house party. It gave him a thrill to see all round the brooding, sinister mountains, and the silent skater, alone on that vast expanse.

"She's a great girl, that she is!" said a voice at his ear. He turned swiftly to find that an old man stood near him on the scarcely trodden snow. He wore a scarf around his neck, and a knitted cap on his shaggy gray hair. "Her name's Miss Lilith; and she teaches the young uns up at the school."

"Lilith! Lilith of the snows!" said Alec, smiling at the old fellow. "She makes a pretty picture."

"And she's as good as she's pretty," was the answer. "She boards with my wife and me."

It was on Alec's tongue to ask him the way to the Carberrys', but already the old man had turned, as if he regretted his friendliness; he trudged off, his sheep dog following at his heel.

AND now, suddenly, the girl became aware of the watcher; she kept glancing in his direction. Presently she came up to the edge of the lake; looked at him inquiringly. The winsome face was framed in nut-brown curls; she had a little fur cap, pulled well down over those dancing curls; and the sparkle in her eyes, and the soft tint whipped by the wind in her cheeks made her more of a rose than a lily. A Christmas rose!

"Can I help you?" she queried.

"I've lost my way. I'm going to the Carberrys'."

"Straight ahead," said the girl, "then first turn to the right."

She had the most enchanting way of speaking, bringing out a demure dimple by her rosy mouth.

"Thank you so much," said Alec gratefully.

He got back into the car and drove slowly away, but the girl's golden-

brown eyes and saucy face went with him. Lilith of the snows! She was just that, with her airy-fairy grace, and the unspoiled charm of her.

He arrived at the Carberry mansion to be greeted by the barking of dogs. In the great hall a group of guests were having tea. A girl detached herself and came toward him.

Just for a moment Alec Carr's heart stopped a beat. It was the very girl he had fled away from—Venetia Trent!

"Wasn't it lucky I heard you were coming here? I worked an invitation for myself. We're going to have a perfectly lovely time!" she said, with a smile on her scarlet mouth.

"I wish you hadn't, Venetia," he answered under his breath. "Didn't you get my letter?"

She gave him that slow, languorous glance of hers.

"Did you think I'd take any notice? Surely Teddy can take care of himself."

"He is my brother, and so you and I cannot be friends," said Alec decisively.

"Friends!" repeated Venetia with a mocking light in her purple eyes. "Have you forgotten so soon? We are lovers, Alec."

"We were; but now I wish to forget," he told her, clenching his hands and looking round almost desperately.

They were quite alone. People had moved away already; for Venetia and Alec to want to be together was an accepted fact.

Venetia was irritated with him. Really, all this was ridiculous. She had flirted with Teddy; he was good-looking, and amusing, but she certainly wasn't going to marry a poor man! Perish the thought!

Alec had fled from New York as though she had a plague. That piqued her. Did he think he could escape? She intended to marry him; his brother Teddy must not prove a barrier!

VENETIA adored handling a car. Speed was second nature to her.

She rose the next morning prepared to go skating, and was irritated when she discovered that Alec had already gone down to the lake.

She borrowed a two-seater from her host and went tearing through the village at a pace that was far too swift. Alec, who had walked down, would never forget that moment when the little girl, holding her brother's hand, trotted across the road to the school door just as Venetia came round the bend.

He was too far away to do anything; he stood turned to stone with horror. Venetia jammed on the brakes, but that would have been too late if it hadn't been for that girlish figure that came, swift as an arrow from a bow, out of the schoolhouse door.

How she did it, Lilith herself could never tell, but plump little Katie Murphy and Charlie, her equally plump brother, were just in time dragged out of Venetia's way.

For a moment Lilith was on the verge of collapse; then suddenly Alec was beside her.

"You saved their lives," he said in a moved voice. "What presence of mind! It was wonderful!"

"I couldn't stand it if anything happened to those children," said Lilith tremulously. "Their mother is a widow, and she worships them."

Now Venetia joined them. She looked marvelously beautiful in her jade-green suède suit, with the jaunty, jade-green cap on her night-black hair.

"What's all the fuss about, Alec?" she said fretfully. "The children are safe."

"Thank God they are," said Alec solemnly. "But they wouldn't have been if it weren't for Miss Bennett."

Afterward Venetia remembered that he had known the girl's name; at the moment she was too upset to notice.

"I don't feel like skating now," she said, pouting. "But do come along, Alec. It's better to go on and forget all about the stupid incident." Then she rounded on Lilith. "You ought to tell the children to look both ways before they cross the road. It was scandalous the way they ran right in front of me."

Lilith's wallflower-brown eyes met the dazzling blue-black ones of Venetia Trent in a direct, unwavering gaze; then, to her own amazement, she stamped her foot.

"The children weren't to blame! You came round that corner at a frightful pace. This is a village main street, and there's a warning of the school around the turn. The children are exceptionally careful. I was standing at the door, and Katie looked."

"Yes, I did look, Miss Lilith. There wasn't no car in sight." The little face looked quaintly virtuous.

"Wasn't *any* car," corrected Lilith automatically. "Run on in, children."

They departed; and then, with a quick smile at Alec and Venetia, Lilith turned away.

"I'm fond of those two. I don't believe in having pets, but they really are dears. Forgive me if I was cross."

"What an insolent young person!" said Venetia as she climbed back into the car. "Talking to us like that! Putting us in our places! What are the underdogs coming to?"

"The surface!" said Alec sharply. He was furious with Venetia. Not only did she seem to think it did not matter that she had driven dangerously, but she dared to speak of Lilith like this.

He was very quiet on the ice. For once Venetia found him dull.

She was an unusually good skater, but Alec could not help comparing her skill with the other girl's.

"I'll get Mrs. Carberry to have an ice carnival while we're here. Wouldn't it be fun to have one on Christmas Eve, with bonfires and hot drinks and things?"

"It would be fun," agreed Alec; then he added: "And invite the whole town." He felt a little guilty, for he knew that there was one girl he wanted to invite.

The moment they got back Venetia broached the subject. The Carberrys were a kindly couple, and they were planning all sorts of gayety for Christmas. A tree for the kiddies in the big ballroom, a dance for the servants, and presents for every one in the village. Venetia's idea was seized upon with enthusiasm.

"We'll give prizes," said old Mr. Carberry. "The people around here will like to be in at it."

Alec was gleefully thinking that Lilith had a good chance of winning a prize.

After dinner he felt a sudden longing to get away. Venetia was most alluring, tempting him to forget his vow. She was so lively, so exacting, too; imperiously demanding that he should be at her beck and call. Once it had thrilled him, but now he was determined not to yield. Presently she decided to dance, and hoping to make Alec jealous, chose a man he did not care for as her partner.

To her astonishment he only smiled as she floated away from him in the other's arms, and soon after he left the room.

He went outside and stood on the terrace for a moment. The night was incomparably lovely. The moon, rising high in a sky of black velvet, gave a magical beauty to the austere scene. The snow-covered mountains were bathed in its soft light, and, below, the lake lay, gleaming like a pearl.

What a little pal she was! What a contrast from the hothouse flower, Venetia!

Something deep down in the man stirred; a longing to keep true to his best self. That demon in his breast whispered that it was no good fighting against Venetia when she was determined he should fall. She moved him so, this scented, groomed, sophisticated woman, who spent hours on her own beauty

And a feeling of panic came as he filled his lungs with the bracing air. What if he didn't hold out? No use

running away; he must win here and now. But could he?

SUDDENLY he saw a slender slip of a girl on the ice. Did she spend every spare moment there? How he would like to be there, too, but it was too far away. Only was it? Using skis he could get there in no time. And in an instant he was indoors, had slipped up to his room, was out of his evening clothes and into tweeds. Now he was creeping softly out.

The skis were in an outhouse. He snatched them up, went to the crest of the hill and put them on.

With the recklessness of the born adventurer, Alec stood poised; then, regardless of the fact that he did not know his district, he took off. Like some gigantic bird he came through the air, alighted on a small plateau, and then took off again.

And Lilith, looking up, saw him coming, and her breath came in a gasp. The next moment he had swooped to earth on the snow by the lake.

"Oh!" said the girl, a scarlet flame in her cheeks, a light in her eyes. "You did that magnificently."

"Thanks," said Alec, highly pleased. "I've brought my skates," he added, half confused. "I saw you from the house, and I envied you and came. Will you give me a turn on the ice?"

"Why, of course," with unaffected friendliness.

In a moment his skates were on and they set off together.

"How is it that you're such a wiz?" he questioned presently.

"I skated a lot in my childhood," she told him.

"Do you like it here?" he asked again.

"I love my work, and I love the children. They're wonderful when you get to know them," said Lilith Bennett softly.

"Will you come to the carnival the Carberrys are giving?"

Her eyes were eager, like an excited child's.

"I don't think I could keep away!"

"You don't get much excitement here," said Alec, smiling down at her.

"No," she admitted. "Still, I'm happy enough. I love reading, and there's a good library."

"What else do you do?"

"Well, most evenings I go for a long walk. I love walking, and it's so beautiful on moonlit nights."

"I guess it is," he answered thoughtfully, and he knew he would like to go on those brisk tramps, too; away from the allure of Venetia. Here was some one who would help to exorcise that fascination.

"I say," he began boyishly, "would you take me with you sometimes? I'd love to explore the country with some one who knows it."

"Of course I will! Gladly! I'd love to show you some of our wonderful mountain views."

A warm sense of well-being pervaded her; a feeling she could not analyze, something different from what she had ever known before, something that sent the blood rioting through her veins.

ALEC shouldered his skis and walked back with pretty Lilith to the house where she boarded. The enchanted night infolded them; above, the bowl of the sky was spangled with stars, brilliants set in black velvet. And the moon, a fragile crescent, seemed very young and new.

"What about going for a good old tramp on Saturday?" he suggested.

"I could spare Saturday," said Lilith, dimpling. "But I mustn't be late, because we're decorating the church."

"Oh, I'd like to be in on that! I'll bring the crowd from the house to help," said Alec swiftly.

"Would you?" cried Lilith. "It would make such a difference. We want holly, lots of it, and I know there's lots on the Carberry grounds, because Douglas told me so."

"Douglas?"

"Douglas Heathcote, a nephew of the people I live with. He'll be home for Christmas; he works for Mr. Carberry in New York. They're so excited about his coming home—they're so proud of him."

"What sort of fellow is he?"

"He's as tall as you, and big into the bargain," said Lilith thoughtfully. "And he has bright blue eyes, and he's a dear!"

"I see," said Alec, and lapsed into silence. He was amazed at his feeling of resentment against inoffensive Douglas Heathcote.

And now they were at the cottage. As they said good-by the door opened, and to Alec's disgust a remarkably good-looking, well-set-up young man stood there.

"Why, Douglas!" exclaimed Lilith. "I've had the loveliest time skating, and Mr. Carr came down on his skis."

She introduced the two men, who were staring at each other in anything but a friendly way. Then Alec departed, and Lilith came in. Douglas looked at her rather sourly.

"So you've been getting a sweetheart while I've been toiling in New York?" he said, half jokingly, but with an undercurrent of meaning.

"How silly you are!" said the girl, flushing hotly. "I hardly know Mr. Carr."

"You seemed pretty thick," was the sullen rejoinder.

Lilith looked at him questioningly, and he said no more, but his heart was heavy in his breast. He had meant to tell the sweet, gracious girl that he cared for her, but was this other fellow in the field first? He had never seen her look like that, her eyes starry bright, her cheeks scarlet.

LILITH felt a thrill of excitement as she jumped out of bed and went to the window. Was it to be good weather for her tramp with Alec Carr? Then she gave a quick sigh of relief, for the day was fine. The snow stretched like a white coverlet over the earth; a robin sat on a tree, piping cheerily; and the sun lighted up the snow into a million dancing crystals. A white, glistening world!

She was packing a lunch when she heard his knock.

"Here, I have food enough for us both," he remonstrated.

"But not Mrs. Mack's homemade bread and cookies," she said gayly.

Douglas watched them go; there was a dark look in his eyes. Had Lilith ever looked so pretty, so care-free? And all day long she would be with that handsome Alec Carr.

Douglas had been given a week to spend in the country, but there was work for him to do at his chief's home. He walked over to the Carberry mansion burning with jealousy and despair. His life would not be worth living, he felt, if another man won Lilith.

Then he got immersed in his work. Presently he looked up to see a beautiful woman drift into the room. She was dark, like a passion flower; her skin had the bloom of a ripe apricot; her eyes were dark and lustrous.

"You're Douglas Heathcote?" she began. "You're staying at Mr. Mack's?"

"Yes. He is my uncle," said Douglas, rising to his feet.

"There's a girl staying there, a school-teacher?"

"Yes."

"She's gone out to-day to show Mr. Carr some of the charming walks round here?" Venetia sneered.

"I believe so."

"Now tell me," she asked, "can I confide in you? We're strangers, I know, but for Miss Bennett's own sake it's only right she should know how things stand, and I don't like to tell her myself. You want what's best for her, don't you?"

"I love her," said Douglas frankly. "I hope to be engaged to her when I go back to the city."

"Oh, then, everything's all right," said Venetia, with an air of relief.

She moved to the door, a slim, supple, exquisite figure in her cherry-red sports suit that made her black hair shine like a raven's wing.

"Lilith hasn't accepted me," said Douglas. "Please explain a little further."

"Really, there's no need. You see, I was afraid she might lose her head over Alec. He and I are engaged to be married. We're keeping it quiet for reasons of our own, but he's a little thoughtless not to tell Miss Bennett. I'd feel guilty if she fell in love with him, but he takes things more lightly. Men always do."

"I'll see that Miss Bennett learns the truth," said Douglas gravely.

"Thank you!" She hesitated, then added: "I'm Venetia Trent."

She had moved back to him now, and put out her hand, and he caught the fragrance of her as of many flowers. He felt grateful to her; she had lifted a weight from his heart.

"Go in and win your pretty Lilith," said Venetia sweetly. "My best wishes are with you."

Then she had gone, and he sat for a moment thinking. He would tell Lilith everything. Miss Trent was right: it was only fair that she should know.

UTTERLY unconscious of anything threatening her new-found happiness, Lilith set off with Alec, her heart light in her breast. Queer how many things they had in common—the same tastes in literature, the same desire to do some good in the world.

"Teaching helps you there," said Lilith, a quaint little look of importance on her face, which tickled him immensely. "You see you do hope to mold them."

"Even Katie and Charlie?" he teased.

"I admit that some of them mold me," she said, and her laughter rang out like a ripple of bells.

She was a gallant little figure, trudging along beside him, the right sort of companion for a man. And then suddenly Venetia crossed his mind; Venetia with her high-heeled shoes, and scented, hothouse atmosphere. Even when she came onto the ice she seemed too scented and well-groomed to belong there. Lilith's bloom was the bloom of nature; her eyes shone with health and happiness.

Halfway up the mountain they paused to admire the view, and Lilith showed him a cave carpeted with straw and dried moss.

"In the summer the children and I come here for picnics, and it's as dry as a bone in winter time."

"What a jolly spot!" said Alec approvingly.

They sat down, and he undid his knapsack, and displayed his contribution to the feast: cold chicken, and salad, and tongue, two thermos bottles with steaming soup and coffee, and no end of unexpected dainties. Lilith cried out in childish pleasure.

"I've got an appetite like a schoolboy," she confessed.

It was impossible to eat everything, and finally it was settled that the remaining provisions should be left in the cave. Then they went on again, up and up, until the air grew more rarefied, and it seemed as though they must touch the very heavens. At last, half ruefully, Lilith paused.

"If we're going to get back in time we ought to turn now."

He stood for a moment, staring out over the dazzling scene; he drew in a sharp breath of enjoyment.

"Thank you, Miss Bennett, for giving me one of the happiest days of my life. I've enjoyed every moment of it," he said. "We'll do it again?"

At his words and look Lilith felt that warm glow envelop her again.

"After Christmas I'll have time," she promised.

They were walking back now; it was easier going. Alec began to tell her of his life; how the adventurous spirit in him had taken him to many far places. He had gone with a polar expedition once, and lately he had toured Africa. She was spellbound by his stories.

And now the sun began to sink behind banks of clouds; early though it was, the short day was ended.

"I'll see you later. We're all coming down to help decorate," he said gayly, as he shook hands at her door.

He took away with him the vision of her bright cheeks and sparkling eyes under the jaunty béret. He was filled with a sense of relief.

He had turned to Lilith in an attempt to forget Venetia, and the thing was accomplished. Already his mind was more attracted to her than to the city girl. It was like a miracle.

He wondered if he had a chance; she was so fragrant, so unspoiled, so utterly clear-souled. There was nothing scheming, or self-seeking about Lilith Bennett. He wondered, with a new humility, if there was anything about him to attract a girl like her.

VENETIA, dazzlingly beautiful as always, was sitting in the lounge when he entered. She was wearing a tea gown of Nile-green georgette, and she yawned daintily as she came toward him.

"I've had a simply gorgeous day," she said in her soft drawl. "I've been planning the carnival—arranging for refreshments and selecting prizes. There's an adorable silver rose bowl for the best skater. I've got my eye on that."

She drew closer to him.

"That young accountant who works for Mr. Carberry is quite a pleasant sort of fellow. I wonder how Miss Bennett will like living in New York."

Alec looked at her questioningly.

"He confided in me that he hoped they'd win the prize for the best couple—it's a case of silver. They've skated together all their lives. You and I must keep out of that contest, because I'd like the young man to win, with his pretty Lilith."

Alec turned abruptly and went up to his own room. So that was how it was. Lilith had told him nothing, and yet she and that handsome, strapping young fellow, Douglas Heathcote,

were engaged! Going to be married! He was furious. Twice he had been tricked—first by Venetia, now by Lilith!

"Well, I'm through with women once and for all!" he muttered, clenching his hands. "I'll never trust one again as long as I live!"

He did not go to help with the church decorations that night, and so, for Lilith, the happy day was spoiled.

AT church on Sunday, as Lilith played the organ, she was conscious of Alec with the Carberry party, a new sternness on his face. Beside him was Venetia, slender as a reed, and lovely as a dream.

Once or twice Lilith's eyes strayed to that exquisite bored face. Was it because of her that Alec hadn't come to decorate the church? She hadn't turned up either, and one of the guests had said: "I like Alec Carr's nerve—drilling it into us that it's our duty to come and help decorate, when he's staying behind because Venetia has a headache! Convenient things—headaches!"

Lilith had felt wounded, yet knew that she had no right to be wounded.

When the service was ended she was glad that the smart crowd of visitors went off quickly in their various cars. Douglas was waiting for her, and together they walked home.

"I never heard the carols sound so sweet," said he approvingly. "I must say that when the Carberry pews are filled it makes a big difference to the singing. Did you notice that beautiful creature swathed to the chin in furs?"

"You mean Venetia Trent?"

"Yes, she told me her name yesterday when I was over there. She told me a bit of news, too—she and Mr. Carr are engaged, but it's a secret at present, though everybody seems to know about it."

"Engaged?" echoed Lilith blankly.

"It 'll be some wedding," went on Douglas, smiling down at her. "A girl like that is going to be stunning in her wedding get-up. A pretty penny she'll cost Mr. Carr in frocks and furbelows."

She did not speak. It was as though where her heart had been was one absorbing pain. Oh, how could she have been so foolish as to think that he had singled her out for any reason except that she was a good guide? Yet, from that first day she had never got rid of his face. In imagination it was with her night and day. Her anguish at Douglas's news appalled her, taught her the truth. She had fallen in love with Alec Carr! With a man who was engaged to another girl!

"There's one thing you've got to do, Lilith Bennett," she said to herself, "and that is forget him at once. You've been in ignorance, but now you know! You must root him out of your heart, and out of your thoughts!"

Easier said than done!

Douglas did not dream of the tumult his words had created in Lilith's breast. He himself was only too relieved to know that Alec Carr and Venetia were engaged. Now he could go comfortably along until the time came to propose. There was no hurry, though. He wanted to save enough to settle down in comfort. His uncle and aunt adored Lilith, and were glad to have her there. It was nice to think they had the company of the girl he meant to marry.

During the next few days Lilith learned what it meant to hide her heart's deep woe; there was so much to do. All the Christmas festivities

seemed to need her guiding hand. The party for the children, which was held in the schoolroom, would have been nothing without her. It was she who made every one feel at home.

Mrs. Carberry gave the presents for the tree, and the dinner, and she dropped in with several of her guests. Alec came and stood just inside the door, watching.

Lilith was like a swift-winged bird, darting from one to another. Oh, what adoring eyes followed her! The children all worshiped her. Once little Charlie Murphy got down from his bench at the table, staggered across to Lilith, and burst into a storm of tears.

She got the truth from him, that he had come to the end of his capacity, but he couldn't bear to leave the rest of the plum pudding. What laughter bubbled up, but Lilith sat apart in a corner with the child on her knee.

She stood there looking at them with a stricken face. Her Alec and another woman!

And one man's eyes left the happy crowd of children, to rest on that lovely picture: Lilith crooning over the

little boy, who, well-fed and warm, had dropped to sleep in her arms. What a picture it made! And he was forever debarred from such sweet, homelike pictures; not for him to have a wife and child, but to wander the earth alone!

Later in the afternoon all the town was invited to the Carberry home, and there was the dancing of the reel and the Highland Fling, and two young men did a sword dance, and Lilith had to play for all this.

Then Christmas Eve came, clear and fine and frosty; to-night was to be the ice carnival by moonlight. Lilith wished wearily that the affair was over, and the house party gone back to town. When the excitement was over perhaps she could settle down again, and forget that Alec Carr had come into her life, to steal her heart all unawares.

It was a brilliant scene, the snow-covered fields and mountains; the lake from which every trace of snow had been swept. Already enormous fires were blazing on the shore, and strings of fairy lamps and lanterns had been swung in festoons over and around the lake.

Every one was thrilled when the current was switched on to light up the hanging globes; there was a cry of admiration. It was as though a chain of fire had been flung from north to south, from east to west, and then it changed and the red lights went out, and green, blue, and yellow flamed into view.

A master of ceremonies with stentorian voice began shouting directions through a megaphone. A band struck up a popular air, and the skating began.

Venetia was there, peerlessly lovely as usual, in a purple velvet suit edged with fox fur. She skated remarkably well, but Alec found no zest in it. In spite of what he had heard about Lilith his eyes were forever on the lookout for her. Venetia was quite right; no one was there who could match her at skating, and she was pleased at the effect of her figure cutting; she and Alec caused many murmurs of admiration. For all that there were whispers in the crowd that Miss Lilith could easily beat that smart young lady from New York.

Where was Lilith? As a matter of fact the little school-teacher was making a pilgrimage to various houses of her scholars, taking them her own gifts.

Douglas met her when at last she came.

"Too bad of you, Lilith," he grumbled. "You know very well there's no one I want for a partner but you."

Unhappy though she was, Lilith exclaimed when she saw the vivid splashes of color made by the electric lights, which kept changing, flinging shades of purple, and amber, and red onto the skating couples, dyeing the snow with prismatic hues. The ache at her heart grew less for a moment, and her eyes lit up again.

And then Alec caught sight of her as Douglas bent to fasten her skates. The man with the megaphone had just called out: "Engaged couples' competition." Lilith did not know that, or she would not have hurried out onto the lake, urged by her enthusiastic partner.

Once on the ice, Douglas and Lilith swept all before them, and quite soon the award was made.

Venetia glided up to the pair as they stood smiling before the plaudits of the crowd.

"I decided Alec and I should stand

aside because a case of silver will be so useful to you."

Douglas looked confused, and Lilith puzzled. Then Venetia turned and skated up to Alec, who was standing by himself, a moody look on his face.

"I've just been congratulating them on getting that case of silver. It's quite a help in setting up housekeeping. Very pretty to see their happiness," she told him softly.

He turned away.

Presently it was time for the single skating, in which Venetia believed herself without a peer. She swirled, cut eights, and generally proved herself an expert at skating. Certainly no one else on the ice came up to her. But Mrs. Carberry had overheard some one behind her say: "She isn't a patch on Lilith Bennett!"

Mrs. Carberry, who had watched Lilith admiringly when she skated with Douglas, beckoned imperatively to Alec.

"People are saying that Lilith Bennett ought to go in for this competition for the rose bowl. Be a dear and see if you can get hold of the girl, won't you, and ask her to perform for us? The people here won't be satisfied if she doesn't skate."

Alec skated toward Lilith as she stood among the other spectators.

"Will you have this with me?" he asked gravely.

The next moment they were skating, and they made a remarkable pair; graceful, well-matched. Many eyes followed them.

"Mrs. Carberry wants you to skate in the final for the rose bowl," he told her.

"I'd rather not."

"That's not fair to your friends," said Alec. "We'll all be sorry."

But Lilith only shook her head.

They finished their skate in silence. And now the band stopped, and the ice was cleared; two or three others entered the contest, but Venetia was by far superior to them. Then Lilith, after all, came out to try. The band played softly, and she skated rhythmically, and with a speed that far outdistanced the others. Then she came into the center of the cleared rink and, poised on the tips of her skates, she did some amazing stunts, leaping high into the air, coming down as gracefully as a swallow alighting.

The applause was thunderous.

Alec remembered watching her that first day when she had been so enchanting, and he had given her her name: "Lilith of the snows." Well, he had lost love, real love, and knew, with a bitterness of his heart that could not be assuaged, that he had never cared for Venetia as he cared for Lilith.

Mrs. Carberry had no choice but to give Lilith the rose bowl; there was no doubt in any mind that she deserved it. Venetia publicly congratulated her, a smile on her scarlet lips, but her dark eyes smoldered with anger. This common girl—how dared she win the prize? Besides, Alec had been like a bear with a sore head all evening; she was sure that was this Lilith person's fault.

"Really, I'm afraid the rose bowl will be rather out of place in your house," cooed Venetia.

"I'm afraid it will," Lilith answered honestly. "But I'll love it all the same. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

And she tightened her hold on it.

Others crowded round, admiring the beautifully chased bowl. When the skating commenced again, however, Lilith was absent, and Alec, too,

had cleared off. The joy had gone for them both from everything.

GOING back to the Carberrys', Alec made up his mind to leave the day after Christmas. He could stand no more. Venetia was no longer a temptation, but he wanted to get away anywhere, to forget Lilith, too.

He found a letter awaiting him from his brother.

DEAR OLD ALEC:

I had a letter from Venetia telling me she has fallen in love in earnest. She says that if you hadn't a penny she still would love you. Yes, you are the lucky man. But she seems to think you're too loyal to your brother to take her, and, old man, I don't want the sacrifice; honestly the pain is less. I think that some day I'll forget Venetia and all I thought she was to mean to me.

There's a girl here, a companion to a frightfully cantankerous old woman, who is charming and sweet, and I might, if I let myself go, learn to care for her. Take that to your heart and let it comfort you, and for goodness' sake don't let me stand in the way of your marrying Venetia. I'm too fond of you for that. Congratulations.

TEDDY.

Alec felt bitterly amused. So Venetia had written to Teddy, and explained that she really cared! He wondered if it was true; if she would really go on caring "if he hadn't a penny." Anyway, it was too late now. He no longer cared about Venetia.

He had just finished the letter when he heard a sound, and, turning, he saw her standing near him. Under the rose-shaded light she looked charming, provocative, in her sumptuous purple velvet frock that swung just above her knee-length black kid boots. Her chin nestled in the soft gray fur, and a rakish little purple velvet cap, edged with the same fur, gave her an impish and yet childlike look, which was entirely foreign to her nature.

"Why have you come back so soon?" she asked, pouting, her red lips curvingly sweet. And then: "Why, that's Teddy's writing!"

Alec nodded.

"What did he say?"

He did not answer. How could he?

"I know! He says he doesn't want us to be unhappy any longer. He says that we've the right to love each other. Oh, Alec!"

Without waiting for him to make the first move, she flung her arms round his neck, drew his head down, and kissed him fervently. And then the door opened, and over her head he saw Lilith standing there.

Her face was white and drawn, and her eyes were clouded with anxiety. But as she saw that picture the color mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes filled with tears. When she found her voice she spoke.

"Please, I've just heard that Katie and Charlie Murphy are lost on the moors. Will you ask every one to set out to look for them? It's snowing, and their mother is frantic."

Instantly Alec put Venetia aside.

"I'll call the servants and make up a search party," he said.

"Oh!" said Lilith gratefully. "Thank you!" Then she turned and went out.

Venetia pulled at his arm impatiently.

"You're not going to be so silly as to go out yourself? These children are nothing to you," she said petulantly. "Just when we've discovered that we can be happy, too!"

He spoke a few words to her, and she drew back, biting her lip in rage.

The next moment he had gone, had roused the house, had taken a lantern and was off.

Meanwhile Lilith had begun to scour the fields. The snow had begun to fall half an hour ago, so lightly, so softly, and yet with such devastating effect. If there had been children's footmarks to follow, there might have been hope.

There must be hope, thought Lilith. There were tears in her eyes, partly because of the children, and partly because her own heart had broken in that moment when she had come inside the Carberry house.

SHE knew now why there was that ache in her throat; why, ever since Alec hadn't turned up for the decorations, there had seemed a stone in her breast where once there had been a living, breathing heart. She resolutely fought back the tears. She had a mission: she must find Charlie and little Katie before the snows got them. Fear shot through her as she thought of what it would mean, such little mites to be lost in the woods.

On and on she went, praying deep in her heart that she might be led to the children.

Presently she heard a delighted bark. Rover, one of the sheep dogs, had joined her. She was thankful to see him, and then suddenly remembered that in her coat pocket was a little glove that Katie had dropped one day coming out of school, and she had picked it up and put it in her mackintosh pocket.

"Look, Rover!" she said, holding the glove in front of the dog. "Find little Katie!"

It seemed as though the sagacious animal understood, for he started off again, his nose close to the ground.

And presently she found them, Katie almost covered with the snow, holding wee Charlie in her arms.

"Oh, Miss Lilith!" cried Katie. "I'm so sleepy, and Charlie's so heavy I can't carry him. We were coming to you to bring you a gingerbread man!"

Lilith's heart was too full for words; she picked Charlie up and began to retrace her steps. But presently she almost despaired, for Katie was worn out and weary, and could go no farther.

Then she realized where she was—near the cave; there would be shelter there, at least.

It took her a good half hour to reach the cave. Inside, the dried grasses made an inviting bed, and suddenly she remembered the good things she had left from that picnic, and thanked God in her heart. She fed the children the remnants of the feast, and then covered them with the hay and sang them to sleep.

It was Alec who found them; Alec, who had remembered the cave. He lifted the little boy, and carried him through the snow to his mother's arms, while one of the servants carried Katie.

And glowing with gratitude, Lilith walked beside him. When it was all over, she almost collapsed from exhaustion. Alec and she were alone in the little kitchen; Mrs. Murphy was putting the children to bed. He put his arm round her and caught her as she swayed.

"Oh, Lilith darling!" he cried anxiously. "You look so deathly white." He rubbed her hands, and presently the color returned to her cheeks.

"I'm all right now. I don't know why I was so silly—it's just the relief," she said.

He answered gravely: "You may as

well know the truth—although you are engaged to Douglas, I love you. I know there's no hope, and I don't want to make you miserable, but when I called you darling it was because I care for you."

"Care for me!" echoed Lilith in a startled voice, her eyes wide and starry.

"Is that so amazing?" he asked, almost bitterly.

"But — for *me!* Why, to-night I saw that wonderful, beautiful Venetia in your arms!"

"Once upon a time I did care for her," he explained, "and to-night, before I could tell her that it was over, she—she did what you saw her do. I told her the truth, that it is too late to recapture the old love, for the new has taken its place. But what's the use of anything?" he added drearily. "You and I were born to meet and part as strangers."

"But why?" asked Lilith, in a soft, thrilling little voice. She was trembling; a strange, wild intoxication swept her.

"Because you're going to marry Douglas Heathcote; because you love him!"

She shook her head gravely.

"It isn't true," she said. "We must speak the truth, Alec, you and I. I don't love Douglas; I never loved any one before you came into my life, and I think I fell in love with you that first day. I never forgot you, anyway—I never shall forget you!"

He put out his arms and drew her close to his heart.

"Oh, my love!" he whispered. "Dearest, and most wonderful, to think that the dearest girl on earth will be my wife! I can't believe it!"

"I can't, either," said Lilith, in a hushed voice. "I was afraid that you were angry with me, and when I saw you to-night with Venetia in your arms, it seemed as though my heart broke. I knew then what was the matter with me, why I had been so miserable. It was because I loved you, Alec, and I thought you did not care for me."

"How could you ever think that, little heart?"

And then suddenly upon the morning air there broke the sound of bells; loud and triumphant, they rang out through the quiet countryside, their message of hope and good will.

"It's Christmas Day!" said Alec. "How I dreaded it; how I feared the misery that I was to endure. Now I'm the happiest man on earth. A happy Christmas, Lilith of the snows."

"Thank you," said Lilith, blushing adorably. "The same to you, Alec. A happy Christmas now—and always."

"I'll have them, always, sweetheart, because you'll be there to make them so!"

His fists clenched as the girl ran to him. "Don't dare touch this child!" he ordered the gypsy

The Love He Scorned

By JUSTINE BEVERLY

CHAPTER I

"I'LL be down in just a minute, Ricky!"

Ricky Winfield pulled his very presentable six feet of white-flanneled figure from the depths of a garden chair and smiled assent up at the beautiful negligéed vision framed in the window above. The long shadows were already creeping across the tennis courts, and he knew that Cornelia Hewitt's "minute" would mean another half hour at least. Yet, as he dropped his racket and sauntered off down the long stretch of lawn toward the woods beyond, his handsome tanned face showed only contentment.

He had had a perfect week-end down here at the Towers, the Bettridges' beautiful estate, only a few hours' run from New York, but buried in seclusion in the thickly wooded slopes of the Catskills overlooking the Hudson. For almost the first time since his engagement he had had Cornelia all to himself, thanks to a kindly fate which had unexpectedly called his host and hostess away, leaving only the old housekeeper to play chaperon. And there remained another long moonlit evening still!

He smiled reminiscently as he turned

into the woods, caught the tang of wood smoke drifting up from the valley below, heard a medley of voices, babies crying, dogs barking, blended by the distance and his own memories into a sound that had always held a strange allure for him.

"Gypsies!" he murmured and, with almost boyish eagerness, quickened his steps in their direction. Suddenly close beside him he heard a girl's voice crooning some quaint foreign jargon. Dancing, too, judging by the musical clink-clank of her bracelets and beads.

Abruptly the song broke off in a cry of terror. He stopped short.

"Don't, Jim! I— Oh—"

The words ended in a shriek of pain, followed by a string of curses and abuse in a man's rough voice.

"You good-for-nothing brat! Singing an' dancin', eh—an' not a basket sold yet! You—"

"Don't, Jim! No— *Please—*"

Something in the girl's voice awakened Ricky, who till that moment had been listening as one in a dream. Abruptly he pushed through the bushes, found himself facing a huge evil-faced gypsy who stood with a great whip high in one hand while his other gripped a mere slip of a girl.

Ricky's eyes were blazing. "How dare you strike that child?" he burst out furiously.

The man turned with a start, fear in his eyes. As he saw Ricky, however, in his immaculate white flannels —tall, broad-shouldered, well-built, but obviously no match for him—he let out a growl.

"Who's askin' ye to butt in?" he demanded, with another oath.

"Don't you dare touch that child!" Ricky ordered again, and now his fists were clenched, his face showing curiously white under its tan.

"No?" The gypsy gave a coarse laugh. "An' who's goin' to stop me?" His whip went up again.

"The police can stop you quick enough!" Ricky threatened.

Again fear showed in the man's eyes, but insolently he demanded: "Well, ain't a man got a right to make his own kids mind—"

"I'm not your kid!" the girl broke in vehemently. "You know very well I don't belong to you!"

"No? So you ain't my kid now, eh?" The gypsy's tone was blustery, but it was plain the girl's words had disturbed him, for he let the whip drop and went on in a whining tone, "It's a different story now, ain't it, when you're gettin' big enough to earn for yourself? But it was all right when you was an ugly little brat an' no one to look after you—I took you then, feed you, bring you up, clothe you, treat you like a father I do—an' this is the thanks I get! I'd ha' got more out of a dog or a horse, I would! I could ha' sold them, anyhow, got a bit back on what I put out on them—"

"You've been paid back long ago, Jim," she interrupted bitterly. "You know very well that I can make an' sell more baskets than any of the others. You know I can tell fortunes better, an' dance better at the fairs than any one else, an' I give you every penny—"

RICKY was staring at her now as though seeing her for the first time. She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, he told himself, standing there like a haughty young princess. Her gay little scarlet skirts and tight black bodice—soiled and cheap though they were—revealed every line of the slim sinuous figure; and her mass of shining black curls swept back from a face of purest oval.

Her eyes, great dark pools under the long black lashes, seemed to reflect every mood of the turbulent nature beneath that lovely exterior.

"An' I'm goin' to leave you—run away from you, earn my own livin'—" she was choking out defiantly.

"Oh, you are, are you? We'll see! You're not leavin' me till you pay back every penny I've paid out on you—what about all those winters I let you go to school?" The big brown hand closed down cruelly on the slim young arm again. Ricky saw the fear creep back into her eyes, even though she still held her head high, let out no cry.

"How much have you spent on the girl?" he demanded curtly.

The gypsy turned, stared hard at him. A crafty expression crept into his eyes.

"I reckon I spent well over a hundred anyhow," he began.

"Then here you are!" Ricky counted out two hundred dollars, held them toward the man, adding, "And you understand you have no further claim on her whatever. She owes you nothing. She belongs to me from now on."

As the dirty brown hand reached out greedily Ricky drew back, said hastily, "No, wait!" and went through his pockets for a bit of paper and pencil.

"What's her name?" he asked crisply.

"Lassa," the girl put in eagerly.

Ricky wrote out a few words on the paper, handed it across to the gypsy and ordered, "Read it out and sign it."

"I give up all claim to the girl Lassa and sell all rights to her, legal or otherwise, to Richard Winfield—" The gypsy read the words out slowly, stupidly, then, at the other's command, scrawled his rude signature at the end. As he received the money, however, his eyes were fixed greedily on Ricky's wallet and he grumbled: "I don't know as this covers all I paid out on her, though."

"The girl is mine now!" Ricky snapped, and the gypsy, after a moment's hesitation, shrugged his shoulders and stumbled off into the woods.

The man turned to the girl. She was staring at him with wide questioning eyes, lips parted like an eager child. He grinned rather awkwardly.

"Well, I guess we'd better get along, Lassa," he said.

"You mean—" she began breathlessly, while under the little tight bodice her breast rose and fell sharply.

"You're coming with me now you belong to me, aren't you?" he asked lightly.

"Where?"

He did not answer for a moment. The full meaning of his cavalier action was just coming home to him. Where? To Cornelia Hewitt? A sudden misgiving seized him.

"But Cornelia will understand and know what to do with the child," he told himself, and aloud he said, "I'm going to take you to the big house up on the hill and to-morrow in to the city where we'll get you started—"

He hesitated. "Started to work," he had been about to say, but something in the childishly expectant face made him finish instead, "How old are you, Lassa?"

"I must be about twenty," she said simply.

"Twenty!" He stared at her incredulously, comparing her mentally to the girls of twenty in his own circle—sophisticated, bored, accomplished society débutantes—and, with growing dismay, thought, "Heavens, it's no child, but a woman I've got on my hands!"

"At least that is what old gran says," Lassa went on, mistaking the meaning of his silence. "She says I was about four when they found me down in Texas—"

"What do you mean?" he demanded, puzzled.

She shook her head dully. "I don't know! That's all they said. They found me wandering alone out on the prairie, they said, and couldn't find any one I belonged to, so they just kept me. But I'm not a gypsy."

She spoke the last words defiantly, face flushed and eyes flashing fire.

"And some day," she went on confidingly, "my heart tells me I will find my own people. Though now"—she hesitated and the lovely color on the dark cheeks deepened as she went on in a low tone—"I don't care any more. I don't want my own people any more!"

"What do you mean?" he demanded puzzled.

"I mean"—her voice was tremulous with emotion—"that Lassa belongs to you now! Lassa wants no one but you! Lassa *loves* you!"

She slipped closer, clasped slender little brown hands about his, pressed her lips passionately to it. And Richard Winfield, looking down into the big dark eyes, saw there no trace of coquetry nor passion, simply the pure love and trust of an innocent child—a love and trust he dare not betray.

CHAPTER II

LASSA moved as one in a dream for the next hour, certain that sooner or later she was bound to waken and find her handsome blue-eyed prince vanished into thin air. She had been loath to leave him for even the few minutes necessary to get her possessions from the camp, but he, reading her thoughts, had laughed and assured her, "I won't go without you, Lassa! Don't you belong to me now?"

She had repeated those precious words over and over to herself as she tied her few treasures into a little bundle and dazedly bade farewell to old gran, the one gypsy she had really loved.

"I belong to him," she was whispering to herself as she sped back up the hill. Then, fairly overcome with the intensity of her emotions, she had stopped, closed her eyes, murmured breathlessly, "Oh, I love him! *Love him!* I would die for him!"

Richard Winfield would have been horrified had he dreamed that his act had opened such a flood-gate of emotion. But Lassa, a woman in years though a child still in innocence, with her warm southern blood and starved nature, had needed but one touch, had responded as a lightly-tuned violin might to the first touch of the bow. There was no thought of shame or humiliation in her heart over the fact that she had been practically sold by one man to another. She had been brought up in an environment where women ranked equally with dogs and horses, and were simply the property of man. She saw nothing unusual in Ricky's words, "You belong to me now," but simply rejoiced that a kindly fate had made her the property of a man she could serve with her whole heart and soul.

She said little as they climbed the hill together, but her eyes were adoring and she felt no fear as to what lay ahead. Even when they came out on the big lawn, saw the stately old house beyond she felt no misgiving, but moved on as one in a dream.

And then abruptly the wakening came.

"Why, wherever have you been, Ricky?" a beautiful voice drawled and a still more beautiful figure rose from the depths of one of the big chairs at hand.

Lassa stared as one mesmerized at a face flawless in its satin pallor, vivid red lips, deep blue eyes under long dark lashes and hair marcelled into waves of sheerest gold. Slowly her gaze went over the slim figure in its seductively simple white dress, the slender white hands with their tinted, exquisitely manicured nails, the feet in the smart white suède shoes, then came back to the beautiful face.

She drew a long breath of awed admiration. Suddenly she saw that the lovely blue eyes were examining *her*, were smiling at her. Something in the smile brought the color racing to Lassa's cheeks, made her suddenly conscious of her own tawdry, soiled dress.

"Whatever is this, Ricky, you funny old dear?" the lovely girl was drawling.

Richard laughed. "This is my little gypsy girl," he explained jokingly. "I've just bought her!"

"You must have been to a rummage sale surely!" she returned lightly, and at that they both laughed.

Lassa did not understand the words, but there was something in the tone and laugh that made her feel more uncomfortable than ever. She stood with eyes downcast listening while Ricky went on, in a half bantering, half serious tone, to tell how he happened to find her.

As he finished, the beautiful girl burst out into a peal of irresistible laughter, laughing till the tears fairly rolled down her cheeks and choking out, "Ricky Winfield. You ridiculous boy! You must be mad! Bought her—oh—*bought* her!"

She sobered down at length, however, ran a critical glance over Lassa and demanded in amusement, "And may I ask what you propose to do with her? Exhibit her?"

The gypsy girl's little brown hands were clenched tightly in the folds of her skirts. Under the long dark lashes her eyes were flashing fire. She understood this last word only too well. It was what they called the freaks at the circus!

But Larry was speaking again, saying, "No, we're not. We're going to give her a decent start in life somewhere. Aren't we, Lassa?"

His tone still gay, but his hand resting on her shoulder and his eyes smiling down into hers he went on, "Don't be frightened, Lassa. This is Miss Hewitt, the lady I am going to marry. She's going to be very kind to you and help you, I know—"

BUT the girl did not hear his words. Her dark eyes, staring at Cornelia, were no longer filled with admiration nor shame, but hatred. So he was going to marry this lovely golden girl—this girl so cold and lifeless, so bored, so unresponsive to the light of love which she could see in Ricky's eyes every time he looked at her. Oh, she hated her, hated her for her beauty, her lovely clothes, her soft cultured voice, her musical laugh—but most of all for her derisive words about Ricky having bought her.

But hadn't he? The hot color surged again to her cheeks as, for the first time, she realized just what that little transaction down in the woods had meant. She had been bought and sold just like a dumb animal, and it was as such this rich girl now regarded her.

But not the blue-eyed prince! The bitterness in her heart melted swiftly beneath the warmth of his smile, and when his big strong hand closed protectingly over hers she forgot Cornelia Hewitt, forgot everything in the world, found herself carried away by another great wave of love and gratitude for him. And she allowed herself to be led into the big mansion, to the old housekeeper who received her with obvious amazement and little warmth.

Meekly, with eyes downcast, she stood listening to Cornelia laughingly repeating the story of "Mr. Winfield's bargain," and asking the old lady to "try to clean her up a little." Under the black bodice her heart writhed, swelled fairly to bursting with hatred. Some day, she promised herself passionately, she too would be a fine mocking lady like this Cornelia Hewitt, and then her turn would come. And, in the meantime, she would endure anything just to be near the man to whom she belonged and whom she loved.

That very night the girlish waif started to struggle up the steep path toward the goal she had set for herself. She followed every word, every move of the old housekeeper who, moved perhaps by the big wistful dark eyes, gradually thawed out and began to talk. Richard Winfield, she learned, did not live here in this big house. He was only visiting for the week-end. He had a big house in the city, was immensely wealthy, owned great copper mines away up in Canada, and was going in for politics, the old lady explained.

Cornelia, surprisingly enough, had no money. But she was of a very old family, and every one thought Mr. Winfield was making a fine match.

Lassa said nothing to all this, but her dark eyes were mocking. She knew now why the golden girl could accept her idol's homage so unresponsively. She was marrying him for his money, that was all!

But he—oh, yes, she had seen his eyes light up when they rested on his fiancée. There was no mistaking why he was marrying her.

LASSA lay awake most of the night thinking, rehearsing all the happenings of this eventful day, writhing afresh every time she thought of Cornelia's mocking laughter, quivering into tenderness every time she recalled Ricky's smiling blue eyes, his tender, "My little Lassa—you belong to me now!" planning feverishly how she could make herself as beautiful and attractive as the girl who had won him.

Her courage failed, however, when morning came—a dismal wet morning—and she found herself being rushed through breakfast with only a brief explanation from the worried housekeeper, "They are starting early and you'll have to hurry."

A moment later she heard them talking just outside the door.

"But it's so ridiculous, so impossible, Ricky, dear!" Cornelia was saying. "Whatever are you going to do with the little tramp?"

She finished with a laugh, but it held a note of irritation.

"That's all right, sweetheart. Mrs. Brown will look after her, I'm sure. I feel responsible for her now that I have taken her away from her old life. We can fix her up somehow till I can get her into town and into some decent clothes. Haven't you something you could loan her for the trip?"

There was a moment's hesitation; then Cornelia, still laughing, said, "Why, of course!"

When she appeared in the doorway a

moment later, however, with a long black coat and little gray felt hat in her hand, her lovely face was anything but smiling. With a plainly disgusted glance at Lassa she threw the clothes on a chair and jerked out ungraciously, "Here you are. And hurry up, we're ready to start."

Lassa's eyes were flashing. "I don't want your clothes! I won't wear them! I hate them and everything that belongs to you!"

At that moment Ricky appeared and called out cheerily, "Hello there, Lassa! All ready for the city?"

Under the spell of his magic voice she picked up the unbecoming dark coat and hat and slipped them on. She was conscious of looking horribly changed and ugly as she came out and climbed into the back seat of the big car. She knew that Cornelia, so beautiful and stylish and happy, snuggled down in the front beside Ricky, was making joking remarks about her.

A sudden wave of homesickness surged over her as, just outside the big iron gates of the Towers, they passed a long rambling line of ramshackle gypsy cars starting out toward the West. Had she been a fool in choosing this strange new life for which she was so ill fitted? Would not Jim's brutality be easier to stand than the subtle cruelty of this rich society girl?

But at this point Ricky turned, flashed one of his brilliant smiles back at her.

"All right, little girl?" he asked, and once again she knew she would go through fire or death just to be near him.

She sat up then, her little chin squared firmly, and made herself listen carefully to the soft laughter, the flip-

"Bought her?" Cornelia laughed insultingly. "My dear boy, you must have been at a rummage sale"

pant conversation of the girl in front. The meaning of most of it was lost on her, but like a born actress, she silently repeated the words, the gestures, noted the way the society girl held her hands, applied her lip stick, daintily tucked in the flying tendrils of hair. She despised her affectations, yet she must be like her in order to make Ricky like and admire her, too.

LASSA had forgotten her enemy when finally they reached the city and drew up before a great stone house in the most fashionable district.

"Come in and have a cup of hot coffee while I hand Lassa over to Mrs. Brown," she heard Ricky say. The next moment she was following them timidly up a broad flight of steps, past a solemn-faced butler, into a spacious, comfortable-looking room, lined, to her amazement, with books from floor to ceiling. She stood miserably self-conscious, her tongue hot and dry in her mouth, as the pair went on into another room and began talking in low tones with some one. About her, she knew, when she heard the golden girl's laughter.

Ricky came back with a kindly-faced, white haired woman and said, "This is my housekeeper, Mrs. Brown." Mrs. Brown helped her off with her coat, not seeming even to see the tawdry little gypsy skirts beneath, and, smiling down at her, said, "We're going to have a fine time together, aren't we, Lassa? We'll start right out this morning shopping, if you are not too tired."

The lonely waif liked her even more when she turned her attention away almost at once and said, "There's a telegram over there for you, Mr. Winfield. It came just an hour ago. Now I'll hurry the coffee along."

Lassa stood awkwardly looking about the room, while Cornelia, stretched lazily in a chair and seeming not even to notice her, poised a jeweled cigarette holder in her dainty white fingers, watching smoke rings float off into the air.

"What is it, old dear?" she asked languidly as Ricky, staring down at his telegram, let out a smothered ejaculation.

He did not answer, but looked up dazedly.

"Anything wrong?" she drawled.

"Wrong?" He gave a hoarse little laugh, ran his hand across his eyes. "Yes, very wrong, if this is true! But it can't be! No—it can't be!"

Under the tan his face was taking on a strange pallor, and Lassa, sensitive to his every move, saw that his hand was trembling.

"What is it, Ricky?" Cornelia's tone was still languid. "The old stock market again?"

But Ricky, too engrossed to hear her, went to the door, called out sharply, "Mrs. Brown, was there any letter for me?"

"No, sir, none!" Mrs. Brown came running, looking troubled.

"What is it, old boy, for heaven's sake?" Cornelia, suddenly aware of the tension in the air, rose sharply to her feet.

He held the telegram out to her. "It's from Peters, the manager of my mines," he stammered hoarsely. "He says he wrote warning me this was likely to happen, but I didn't get that letter—it's a bolt from a blue sky to me!"

"What does he mean?" There was a sharp note in the languid voice as she looked up from the telegram. "Your copper mines have petered out—there's no more copper?"

He nodded miserable assent, with a laugh that was more like a groan. "And to think I've just put fifty thousand into new engines and buildings up there."

Cornelia was silent a moment, but her eyes were slowly narrowing, giving her pretty face a strangely shrewd look.

"Well, I for one don't believe it," she burst out sharply at length. "Peters must be mad! If the mines have gone, why did he let you go ahead and sink all that money in them? He's mad or a crook!"

"Oh, no, Cornelia, Peters is not mad. And I'd trust him with my life. Those things happen often in mining. The vein is exhausted, that's all! The cleverest engineer in the world might run into the same thing."

She did not answer for a moment, but Lassa saw her fingers clench tightly on her cigarette, and her voice, when she did speak, trembled.

"Well, it's fortunate you aren't dependent altogether on the mines then, Ricky," she said.

He looked up haggardly. "That's just the trouble," he admitted. "I was! After that stock market crash last year—then sinking practically all my available cash into the new machinery—"

"What a fool trick!" the golden girl ejaculated.

Lassa's dark eyes smoldered. She had not been able to follow all this conversation about the mines, but she did understand that now, in the hour of her idol's calamity, the woman who should have been helping him by her sympathy was blaming him. And as she looked across at the beautiful face, so like a mask still, she read in it the real nature behind it. Her teeth clenched as she looked back to Ricky, saw the brave smile on his lips, heard his words.

"Don't worry, Cornelia, it may be all a mistake," he said. Crossing to her, he attempted to draw her into his arms. But she pushed him away nervously. "Ricky, don't you think you ought to get down to the office and see if the letter is there? Or wire—or do something about it?"

AFTER they had left Lassa found herself being led up to a dainty bedroom with a beautiful bathroom adjoining. Mrs. Brown produced a neat little voile dress of her own, suggesting tactfully that she bathe and put this on.

"Though I'm afraid our shopping trip will have to wait till poor Mr. Winfield finds out just how things are," she said in a worried tone.

Lassa was glad to be alone. She felt very strange and lonely in the sedate dark voile dress, with her black curls knotted up primly behind. Disconsolately, timidly, she wandered around the luxurious big house, too engrossed in her thoughts of Ricky and his trouble to be impressed. Down in the kitchen she could hear the servants—and there seemed to be a lot of them—excitedly discussing the news.

"We'll all be looking for new jobs, I guess," the butler was saying, "for he won't have money enough to keep us on. Likely the house and everything will have to go—"

Everything! The word struck sudden terror into her heart. Perhaps she too would have to go! Perhaps it would be better if she slipped away right now without worrying him any further.

"But then he will wonder where I am and worry still more. Perhaps he will think I didn't want to stay with him because he's poor now," she told

herself. But deep in her heart she knew the reason she stayed was because of the love she bore him. No! Poor or rich, she was going to stay with him, serve him, work for him even as gypsy girls worked for their men, help him in his trouble.

The rest of the day dragged slowly. She suffered acutely when the butler summoned her to dinner and was much too self-conscious under his stares to eat any of the dainty food Mrs. Brown had had prepared for her. She was glad when they all disappeared for the night and she was able to curl up in a big window seat where she could stare uninterrupted down the street, waiting to catch the first glimpse of Ricky. But it was after midnight when finally he appeared. And then, weak with very love and eagerness for him, she found herself powerless to pull herself from her nook to greet him.

He sank down heavily before his desk, buried his face in his hands and then she knew that the worst really had happened. Instantly she forgot herself, her heart swelled almost to bursting with love and pity for him. Silently she slipped out, ran across to him, gently touched his shoulder.

He looked up with a start, stared at her dazedly for a moment, then wearily muttered, "Oh, it's you, is it? What on earth are you doing up at this hour?"

His words and tone were like cold water on her spirits. He had forgotten her already, had scarcely recognized her in fact.

But at that moment he smiled, reached out and patted her hand tenderly as he said, "You shouldn't have waited up for me. You look very tired."

"Oh, I had to, sir!" she burst out tremulously and her big dark eyes were dimmed with tears. "I couldn't go to bed till I knew you were in. I wanted to help you somehow."

He shook his head, gave a short wry laugh. "It would take more than you to help me, I'm afraid. I'm a ruined man to-night! Clean wiped out—not a penny left—"

She hesitated a moment, then touched her tongue to dry lips and began, "Then perhaps I had better go, Mr. Winfield."

"Go? Go where?" he asked dazedly.

"Why, I—I can go back to—to the gypsies—" The words came haltingly, for she was struggling hard to keep back the tears that would tell him just how hard it was to say them.

"To that Jim? Surely you don't want to go back to that brute?" Ricky asked disgustedly.

"Oh, no!" There was a flash of fear in her eyes, but the next moment she had gained control of herself and managed to explain, "No, but I meant that perhaps he would pay you back that money you gave for me—and—some of the gypsies are kind, sir—"

"Oh, I understand now, Lassa. It's to help me out, eh? But that two hundred dollars wouldn't be a drop in the bucket, my dear, and I wouldn't let you go back to that brute for anything. He'd only make it doubly hard for you now. No! I'm not quite that hard up! And I shouldn't have let you worry over all this muddle. It won't make any difference to you. I'm going to see that you get a good home somewhere and have a start in life."

"Let me stay with you, sir! Oh, please, let me stay!" Her hands clung unconsciously to his arm. Then, as he remained silent, staring down at her with an expression which she took to be dissent, she cried still more passionately, "Oh, please let me stay with

you! I won't be any burden to you. I'll work so hard—I can cook and sew and make baskets—I'd wash your clothes or do anything—"

Her beautiful dark eyes, looking up into his, made an even more eloquent appeal than her lips. Suddenly he laughed a little unsteadily. "All right! I'll keep you, Lassa!"

But his eyes were very tender as he watched her slip from the room. Foolish, of course, but one could not turn out even a dog when it regarded you with such adoring eyes, he told himself.

CHAPTER III

NEVERTHELESS, Ricky Winfield regretted his promise to his little gypsy girl more than once during the strenuous days that followed. The news of his loss had been confirmed a few days after when Peters's missing letter turned up. Things were, in fact, much worse than Winfield had anticipated.

He found himself with only a few thousand dollars cash, the old farmhouse where he had been brought up as a boy, and a pile of bills. It was characteristic of him that he settled these last at once, paid off his staff of servants—all excepting Mrs. Brown, who insisted upon staying, even unpaid, to help him for a while—and leased furnished the big city home. Characteristic of him, too, that he held his head high, asking no sympathy, refusing to be crushed, and taking the best view of matters. He was still young, he told himself, he had brains, personality, a good education and no fear of hard work. His early life on the farm, before the death of the old uncle who had left him his wealth, would stand him in good stead now.

But there were other complications. First Lassa, the wild little gypsy whom fate had pushed into his life and evidently intended to keep there. A dozen times he had asked himself why he had not accepted the girl's offer to go back to her old life. Cornelia considered him a fool for keeping her. She thought, of course, that he had put his charge out in the kitchen with Mrs. Brown to learn something about housework. He did not dare let himself think what she would say if she discovered that he was, in reality, keeping the little gypsy with him more as a sister than anything else. But somehow she had twined herself around his heart.

He liked to come in at night, see her sitting across the table from him, in one of her new frocks which he had insisted Mrs. Brown buy for her. He loved to listen to her gay chatter, her merry laughter and quaint comments on her strange new surroundings, loved to see the big dark eyes glowing with excitement or welcome for him. Cornelia would have been disgusted had she known. But she didn't. She knew very little about him these days, in fact.

At first Ricky just could not believe that a rift had come between them. His trouble had made him supersensitive—he and not his fiancée had changed, he told himself. But gradually, as her coldness became marked, when every time he called she was out or was too busy to go anywhere with him, he had to face the truth.

Then came the rumor that she was going about with Neville Wiltshire, a man much older than herself and not of very enviable reputation, but of immense fortune.

Ricky grew very thin and white these days and went about with a hurt

look in the eyes that had formerly been smiling. In his great love for Cornelia he had set her upon a pedestal, idealizing her as all that was fine and noble in woman. And now he steadfastly refused to believe that anything as material as money could have destroyed that ideal. But on the day that he met her and Wiltshire coming arm in arm out of a fashionable restaurant he had to face the truth. Cornelia's pretty face had flushed, but she had carried the meeting off well, waving him a friendly but very casual greeting and passing right on into Wiltshire's car.

He laughed bitterly to himself as he made his way home. He had been a coward all along in not offering to release her, afraid of the answer she would give. Now there was no alternative but to write her and finish the agony.

"YOU'RE sick, Ricky," Lassa said anxiously when he came in. She was kneeling by a big box packing some of the things they were to take to the old farmhouse in a few days. She rose, ran forward, her pretty face all concern.

"I'm all right," he muttered thickly, pushing her aside and passing on toward his own room.

She bit her lip, flushed deeply, then caught her breath as he stopped by the library table and picked up a small white object.

"What's this?" he demanded.

She did not answer, but stood, her dark eyes filled with pity, as he ripped off the covering, opened a little white velvet box, took out Cornelia's magnificent big square-cut diamond ring. After a moment he gave a harsh little laugh, let it drop to the floor as though the very touch of it hurt his fingers. Then he took up the big square envelope which had been lying beneath.

DEAR RICKY:

Things cannot go on like this any longer, can they? Don't you think it would be better to end this farce? Why be sentimental and talk of love when you know as well as I, Ricky, that I was never meant to be a poor man's wife? It would only be the death of our love.

Don't think too hardly of me, dear boy. I like you better than any one I have ever known or will likely ever know again, and I wish things could have turned out differently for us. Just try to forget me and find consolation in some one better suited to you.

CORNELIA.

He read the note slowly through. He had known, of course, what she was going to say, but he had scarcely expected her to be so brutal about it. Slowly his gaze went from it to the lovely big cabinet photo of her standing on the desk just beside him—the photo she had had taken especially for him when they became engaged. The beautiful eyes seemed speaking now of purest love, the soft curved lips still inviting his kisses. False eyes, false lips, that responded only to the Midas touch of gold!

He gave another harsh laugh, then, in a sudden fit of rage, seized the offending photo, ripped it into a dozen pieces, hurled them to the floor.

Behind him Lassa gave a little gasp and ran forward, her eyes big with fear. He turned sharply. "What! You here still? What are you doing here? Why haven't you left me, too, now I have no money—like other women?"

He broke off with a sardonic laugh. "Women! Gold-diggers every one of them! They'd sell their souls for money! And yet"—his voice broke as

he went on—"I was fool enough to think she loved me for myself alone!"

She did not answer, but dropped a timid little hand on his arm. At that he turned, demanded harshly, "What's the matter? Why do you still stand there staring at me? Why don't you pack up, get out—I've no money!"

Did he not love her, his wife? Why did he hesitate?

She drew back, hurt and indignant. And suddenly her head went up proudly, her cheeks flamed.

She took a step toward him.

"How dare you compare me to Cornelia Hewitt? Oh, I hate her! Despise her! And you—you aren't fair! All women aren't the same! I'm not! I wouldn't care if you were a tramp on the road. I"—her anger melted into tenderness and impulsively she took his hand between hers, while her voice sank to a tremulous whisper—"why I wouldn't leave you, sir—not for all the world—"

She paused and gulped.

He did not answer for a moment, but gradually the bitterness in his eyes disappeared.

"I'm sorry, little girl," he said more gently. "I was unfair to talk to you as I did. You're such a brave, loyal little soul. I don't know what I would have done without you during these hard days."

She did not answer. Suddenly he felt a warm cheek with a tear on it pressed against his hand. His gaze went back to the bold black words on the table before him.

"Find consolation in some one else!"

They mocked him. And, even as they did, Lassa's soft young lips were pressing against his hand. They sent a strange little current through him, wakened in him a strange desire, or was it exultation?

Here at least was real love waiting to be lavished upon him! Here was a way to show Cornelia that she had meant as little in his life as he had in hers. And, after all, what difference did it make? One woman was as good as another!

Lassa's soft little hands crept up to his shoulders, her lithe beautiful body clinging close against his, the sweet fragrance of her hair enveloping him. Impulsively his arms closed around her, drew her close.

"Lassa," he said hoarsely, "I am going to take you at your word. You say you will never leave me—well then, you won't! I am going to marry you!" Then, as she looked up dazedly, he went on hurriedly, "I'm poor, but you won't care! You are used to poverty. And I will be good to you, try to make you happy—will you marry me, Lassa?"

There was a moment's tense silence.

"Your wife?" she whispered at length.

He nodded.

He felt a slight little tremor pass through her, saw a sudden beautiful light in the dark eyes. Then tremulously she breathed, "I will!"

CHAPTER IV

HE wakened the next morning with a violent pain in his head and a still greater pain in his heart. Cornelia's beautiful face was smiling at him from a gold-framed photo on his dressing table. He could not believe that she had passed from his life forever.

But she had! And already he had put some one in her place! He gave a groan as the memory of all that happened the previous night came rushing back. What a fool he had been! What had possessed him to ask the little gypsy girl to marry him? As though in her or any one else he could find forgetfulness!

The very thought of another woman in Cornelia's place this morning nauseated him. Yet he must, out of fairness, stand by his word. The child, thank heaven, had accepted his offer, not out of any silly sentimentality for him, but simply out of gratitude and her desire for a home and protection. Marriage with her would not be the exquisite dream of passion that it would have been with Cornelia—he could not have borne it had it been!—but simply a business proposition. He would try to make a success of it, too.

But Cornelia's photo smiled mockingly at him. He took it up frantically, jammed it far back into a drawer, then, without breakfast—feeling he just could not stand Lassa's shining eyes this morning—he rushed off to his office. If only he could get away from every one, from everything that reminded him of the girl who had been so cruel—he *must* get away, he told himself, or lose his reason.

Looking over the muddled reports that Peters had sent that morning he decided suddenly that the best thing he could do would be to go up to Northern Canada, see how things stood for himself. Not that there was any likelihood of Peters having made a mistake. He had known the man for years, had absolute confidence in him both as a friend and as an engineer. But it was a

half million dollar loss and warranted careful investigation, he told himself.

In his heart of hearts, however, he knew as he started for home that night that he was really making the trip to escape heartache. Perhaps, with Cornelia no longer near him to torment, he might forget. Perhaps, too—though he felt guilty as the thought came—by the time he returned Lassa would not wish to marry him, would have found some one else to lavish her affection on.

He felt still guiltier when he entered the house and she came running to meet him, her hands outstretched, her big dark eyes brilliant with welcome. She was wearing a new gay colored gown and never had looked prettier. Somehow he could not remain unresponsive before such warmth and involuntarily found his hands closing over hers.

"It's been such a long day, Ricky!" she said shyly. "I just thought it would never end. It's so much lonesomer now!"

"Lonesomer now? What do you mean?" His tone was quite fatherly.

"Why, now you belong to me!" she explained, while her cheeks flushed.

He hesitated a moment, then, fearing her warmth would melt his resolutions, said, "Oh, you mustn't get lonely like that or you'll be having a terrible time when I got away up north!"

"What do you mean?" She drew back, her eyes wide with alarm.

"I'm going up to Canada to look over the mines," he explained, "and I will probably be gone several"—months he had been going to say, but something in her face made him change—"weeks."

"Several weeks!"

He laughed at her dismay, tilted back her head playfully.

"Yes, isn't that terrible?"

But her lips were quivering and in a choked little whisper she asked, "When are you going?"

"Just as soon as I can get off. In a couple of days I expect." He was lighting a cigarette, attempting to sound casual as he went on, "But you'll be all right here with Mrs. Brown. You'll both be down at the old house and—"

"Ricky!" Like a statue come to life she clutched his hands feverishly in hers, lifted her beautiful face to his. "You aren't going to leave me here alone, are you? You promised to keep me with you—why can't I go with you, Ricky?"

He did not dare trust himself to look into the dark eyes, but laughingly tried to free himself from her clinging fingers.

"What! Take you away up to the wilds of Canada? Why, what would I do with you up there, child? Women never go up there. It's only for the roughest type of men!"

"Yes, but I'm different from other women," she insisted. "You forget that I've lived out in the open all my life. I can walk as far as any man without tiring—I don't mind the rain or cold or bad food—and I could help you, Ricky—I could cook for you and look after you—"

"You silly little girl! You don't know what you're talking about. Even gypsies never go up to this part of the world, and I wouldn't be roughing it like that anyhow. I'll be living in Peters's shack with him, and he wouldn't thank me for bringing a little girl along to trouble him—"

"But if we were married?" she put in breathlessly.

He tried to laugh the suggestion off, but her soft fingers pulled his face down to hers.

"What would I do here alone? I would *die*, Ricky!"

The passion in her voice moved him strangely. He was not trusting himself to look at her, but the soft young body clinging close against his was making a still more eloquent appeal than the voice. After all, why should he not marry and take her along? She would be company for him, dispel the torturing memories of Cornelia. Sooner or later, he realized, he would have to keep that promise and marry her.

He hesitated just a moment, then bent, lightly brushed his lips across the soft red ones.

"All right, little coaxer," he agreed lightly. "I'll take you! But remember, I warned you—"

"And we'll be married right away?" she interrupted with the artlessness of a child.

"Right away—just before we start," he agreed.

THE week passed swiftly, crowded with the settling up of his affairs. He was steeling himself all during these days not to think of his lost love, telling himself that in the future he would have no moral right to indulge in memories or regrets. And he was just beginning to feel he was succeeding in his efforts when a chance meeting with her sent everything crashing.

It was the night before he was to leave—the last night of his freedom, for all arrangements were made for his marriage to Lassa. He was making his way slowly home through the park when suddenly before him he saw her. Slim, beautiful, faultless in every detail of her dress, from the chic little gray felt hat under which one just glimpsed gold, to the smartly tailored costume and gray snake-skin shoes, she looked to him the most perfect thing he had ever seen. She was walking alone, strangely enough, in the dusk, slowly and with eyes downcast.

She looked up and saw him before her. The rich color flooded her cheeks and unmistakable welcome shone from her eyes. Unconsciously she raised her hands to him, whispered "Ricky!"

He did not answer. The nearness of her, her exquisite beauty, the welcoming light in her eyes had sent crashing the wall he had built. It was all he could do to keep from taking the slim outstretched hands in his, drawing her to him, crushing her fiercely in his arms. But the memories of the past bitter week rose before him and held him back. He gave a wry smile, though he was white now to his very lips.

"Aren't you going to speak to me, Ricky?" she asked tremulously. "Do you hate me quite that much?"

"Is there anything to say?"

"But—we can at least be friends," she began miserably, her face as pale as his.

"Why friends? I didn't know you cared to number poverty among your friends!"

Her teeth bit fiercely into her lower lip. "You're cruel, Ricky," she said. "You think you're the only one who has suffered. Don't you think that I, too, am miserable? Do you think that I wanted to give you up? No! A thousand times no! But you know as well as I do that under the circumstances it would have been only madness for us to have married. What would we have lived on? I've never done an hour's work in my life—I know nothing about housekeeping—I couldn't have stood it, Ricky! I couldn't be poor! I'd only develop into an old shrew and you would hate me within a year. Isn't it more sensible, more fair to us both, to face the thing now than later?"

"You're honest at least!" he put in bitterly.

"I am," she began proudly; then abruptly her voice changed, became tender, pleading. "Ricky, it isn't that my heart has changed at all. I still love you and always will."

"But you love money more, is that it?" he demanded, then as she stood silent before the scorn in his eyes, he went on, "And you offer your friendship! You offer to throw me the few crumbs you can spare from the table where you dine with other men who have more money than I! Friendship! After all we have been to each other!"

"Ricky!" She tried to stem his torrent of hot words, but he went on relentlessly.

"Your offer of friendship is an insult to me. I may have gone down in the social scale, but I still have my manhood left, thank heavens! I once thought you loved me, but I know now that love was only a mockery. Love means all or nothing—"

"You must listen, Ricky!" she interrupted in desperation. "I am not trying to insult you, and it is only because I really do love you that I cannot see you go out of my life altogether. I mean that perhaps some day your luck may turn. Daddy has a lot of influential friends, you know, and if you and he got together, talked things over, he might be able to get you started uphill again. Then if you made good—"

But something in his eyes silenced her. He was staring at her curiously, reading now for the first time, even as Lassa had, all the shallowness and selfishness behind that beautiful face. And suddenly he saw himself just as plainly—a blind fool who had been duped by a lovely painted mask!

"I understand, Cornelia!" he said in a tone that had become strangely calm. "I thank you for your offer, but I am afraid it will be a long time before I have enough again to compete for your favors. And your father's influential friends might not be able to get me anything that really paid! There would be no use your waiting for me anyhow"—his words were cruelly sharp—"for if I was as rich as Rockefeller I wouldn't want you nor your love. Love! You don't know what the word means. You say your love would die if you were poor. Real love cannot die. I know now that I never was in love with the real you. I was in love with a beautiful ideal, some one with a soul as beautiful as her body. Then, in the darkest hour of my life, I found the body had no soul at all! It was simply a beautiful puppet which moved at the touch of gold."

He gave a bitter laugh. "But I have to thank you for one thing at least. You did not prolong the agony. You crashed my ideal with one blow! And now your offer to take me back on probation comes too late! I have already made plans for my own future. I am leaving for the mines tomorrow with my wife!"

"Wife?" she echoed dazedly.

"Yes, wife!" And then, because it was his moment of triumph, and he saw the fear in her eyes, he laughed. "To-morrow I am marrying a girl who is not afraid of poverty! Lassa!"

There was a moment's tense silence.

"Lassa! The gypsy beggar!" she choked out, and gave a high mocking laugh.

That laugh was still ringing in his ears hours later. It told him plainer than words that his revenge was punishing himself more than any one else. Told him, too, that this foolish mar-

riage with "a gypsy beggar" was not going to free him from his bondage to Cornelia. For at that moment, with her mask of beauty torn from her, with her mocking laughter still echoing in his ears, he could scarcely refrain from turning back, crawling on his knees if need be, only to see her lovely eyes once more smiling into his, feel her soft lips clinging to his.

He did not see Lassa that night, nor the next day until the very hour when Mrs. Brown and the minister and the old school friend he had called in for the occasion, were assembled in the living room ready for the ceremony.

His heart smote him when his bride appeared in the doorway in a simple little white silk dress and a spray of waxen orange blossom tucked in her black curls, her face flushed gloriously, her eyes glistening like stars. He felt even guiltier as her soft little hand slipped into his and he heard her tremulous "I will," to the beautiful words of the service. His own responses seemed to be coming from some one else, far-off, and like one in a dream, he heard the minister finally congratulating him and "Mrs. Winfield."

Then he looked down into Lassa's big dark eyes, saw in them a love and trust that fairly startled and shamed him.

He made a vow in his heart, that whatever the motive that had led him to take this simple little trusting girl as his wife, he would do his best now to carry out his vow to "love, honor and cherish her," all her life.

CHAPTER V

THE long journey up to northern Canada, with its torturing memories, was a nightmare to Richard Winfield, but to his little bride, all unsuspicious of the grip the old love still held over him, it was one long dream of bliss. Her heart, starved always for even a little affection, was quite satisfied with the dregs of love which Ricky flung to her from his once overflowing cup.

She blossomed out on the trip like a beautiful little flower. She took the greatest delight in her tastefully gay little sports costumes which Mrs. Brown had bought for her, spent every spare minute when Ricky was not with her poring over books, trying to improve her grammar and manners, and learning to be "a lady," as she told herself. She saw nothing strange in the long hours her new husband spent in the smoker away from her, nor that all during that long three weeks' trip he was scarcely ever alone with her. She had no misgivings about this strange hurried marriage of hers. Cornelia Hewitt no longer existed in her world, and she was equally confident that it was so with Ricky? Else why had he married her? Why had he kissed her after the ceremony, why did he call her "my little Lassa," as he did?

Sitting in the canoe, studying his thin, tanned face, so handsome against the rough bush clothes, she felt no girl had ever been so fortunate. And when he turned, smiled at her, her heart filled almost to bursting with love for him.

She loved everything, in fact, about the journey, the great silent woods that seemed more like home to her after the strange confining walls of the big city house, the long portages around the rapids when she followed, never tired nor complaining, after her man, beaming with delight when, at the end of the long day, he would say kindly, "You're a great little sport, Lassa!"

Nevertheless she breathed a great sigh of relief when they finally arrived

at the manager's shack and the trekking was over.

Harry Peters was a thick-set, dark-haired man of about forty, whose clever face would have been handsome had it not been for the marks of dissipation and weakness of the mouth. His bold black eyes lighted up in surprised admiration when the owner introduced Lassa as his wife, and the admiration was even more marked when she came out of the one big bedroom later on, freshened up after the journey and startlingly pretty in a gay little scarlet outfit.

The girl was quick to notice his glances and rejoice in them. Not from coquetry, but because she had been brought to regard her prettiness as an asset, and because this first night she was to be alone with Ricky she wanted to look her best. She was like a gay little wood nymph at the table that evening, with her flushed cheeks and starry eyes, and laughter always ready to bubble over.

Ricky, however, was too engrossed in his conversation about the mines to notice her, and as soon as dinner was finished settled down with Peters to study files. Lassa waited around for some time, then quietly stole into the bedroom, took off her gay little scarlet dress, wrapped herself in a soft cream negligee—the only really bridal garment she possessed—and settled herself on the window seat where she could look out at the great sweep of forest silvered by a full moon.

She sat so quiet that one would have almost thought she was sleeping, but, in reality, every nerve in her body was tense, her ears strained for every sound from the next room. And when finally she heard the chairs being pushed back, and Peters's cheery "Good night!" a strange faintness stole over her, leaving her powerless to turn when she heard Ricky at the door.

"What! Sitting in the dark?" he asked in some surprise as he came in.

"No! In the moonlight!" She tried to speak lightly, but her heart was in her throat, smothering her. As he came nearer she began to tremble violently. She was glad of the dark hair shrouding her telltale face and white bared shoulders from him.

"Tired, little girl?" he asked kindly, letting his hand rest on her shoulder. "I'm afraid you are going to find it very lonely and rough up here."

"Lonely! With you?"

She looked up then, her whole being responding to that electric touch on her shoulder. Swiftly she slipped to her feet, drew his face down toward her lips, lifted temptingly.

"Ricky, you do love me, don't you?" she whispered breathlessly.

"Love you? Why, of course I do! Aren't you my little wife?" he responded at once, but his voice sounded hoarse and unnatural and his face, in the moonlight, looked strangely pallid. He hesitated a moment, staring down at her, then, as her lips came closer, pulled her to him and almost roughly rained kisses on her lips, her closed eyes, her full white throat.

And then, just as abruptly, he pushed her from him, turned and stumbled from the room.

Nor did he come back again.

Doreen was hungry; she was cold; she was penniless; she had nowhere to go. And it was Christmas Eve!

Castaway at Christmas

By ETHEL DONOHER

CHRISTMAS was in the air. It was charged, buoyant, exhilarating air, of the sort which sweeps over the earth but once a year. Even Doreen Fitzgerald was conscious of it as she paused dejectedly at the corner of Union and North Avenues. Yet Doreen, who was stranded in Cranford, New Jersey, without a roof over her head, and with exactly thirty-eight cents in her purse, was like a small ghost wandering upon the outskirts of joy and plenty. A lovely little ghost she was, too, with purple-blue eyes smudged into cream-white skin with—so her Irish grandmother would have said—dirty finger tips, and a cloud of soft black hair closely confined in a small, low knot beneath her plain little hat. Her coat unfortunately was thin, because, although she was now eighteen years old, she had during the summer months outgrown the one she had worn last winter.

Aunt Esther had intended to buy her a new coat this year, Doreen remembered, blinking back the quick tears which blurred her eyes. Good, kind, darling Aunt Esther! Oh, why had she had to die? Why couldn't things have gone on at the farm just as they were? How could she ever do without Aunt Esther?

Go gle

And yet Doreen's Aunt Esther had not been any real relation to her. She had been an old friend of the girl's mother, and when Doreen, at the age of four, had lost both her parents, Miss Esther Holbrook had taken the unprotected baby to her farm near Kennebunk, Maine, and had brought her up as her own child. It had later developed that a cousin of Doreen's mother, Miss Martha Cornish, was living in Cranford, and was willing to do what she could for the child. Miss Holbrook, however, needed no one to help her care for the baby she had taken into her home. She loved Doreen, shielded and protected her — but she neglected to make a will and so provide for the girl's future.

When Esther Holbrook died, therefore, her farm and her money had gone to a brother whom Doreen had never seen. Miss Holbrook's brother had not come on for the funeral, but by letter he had made it clear enough that he had no intention either of sharing his inheritance with Doreen, or taking the responsibility for her. He allowed her fifty dollars, which would, he explained, take her to the cousin in Cranford, who could, undoubtedly, assist her to earn a living.

But Doreen had had to use some of that fifty dollars for an inexpensive black frock and hat to wear at the funeral. Then there had been other small expenditures. She had, however, written to Miss Martha Cornish to say that she was coming immediately to Cranford. And Doreen had felt reasonably sure of a welcome. Miss Cornish had frequently invited her young cousin to visit her. Also, she had never failed to remember Doreen at Christmas time.

Now, needing most desperately the protection of her elderly cousin, Doreen had not even waited for a reply to her letter. She who had never before been farther away from the farm than Kennebunk, started for Cranford the day after her Aunt Esther's funeral. She had this afternoon reached her destination with thirty-eight cents in her pocket, and had then discovered that her Cousin Martha had gone away. Her little house was closed. Even the blue-green shutters were shut. Neighbors had told Doreen that Miss Cornish was visiting friends over the holidays; but no one seemed to know just where Miss Cornish was, nor when she would return.

That, then, was Doreen's situation: she had not enough money to pay for food and a place to sleep in this little town that was getting ready for Christmas.

"Oh," she asked herself fearfully, "what shall I do? It's after three o'clock, I haven't had any lunch, and I'm so hungry! And where can I go to-night? Will I have to sleep outdoors?"

There was, she remembered with a swift stab of pain, some one in Cranford to whom she might appeal. There was Tom Lawrence. Of course she didn't know where he lived, but she could easily find out.

"I won't go to him, though," Doreen told herself through clenched teeth. "I won't go to him if I have to stay out in the snow all night. I— I'd *freeze* first!"

For Tom Lawrence, while visiting in Maine last summer, had kissed Doreen and ridden away. This had happened after they had been together daily for two weeks, after Tom had called at the farm and been approved by Aunt Esther.

Doreen, then only seventeen, had worshiped Tom blindly. At first it

had not seemed possible that so great and exalted a being as he could ever care for her. Then, that never-to-be-forgotten night when he had first kissed her, Doreen believed in the good fairies, in the angels who are reputed to look down upon the earth through the stars, and in the love of Tom Lawrence.

The old farm that had sheltered her had also kept her apart, until that summer, from the strangers who came each year to Kennebunk. A kiss, therefore, to that amazingly unsophisticated and seventeen-year-old Doreen, had been a pledge of faith and loyalty and love eternal. She had known, you see, very little about the ways of young college students.

She learned, though, when Tom went away, after bidding her an affectionate good-by which held no promise of return. He had kissed her many times, and she had let him, but he had not loved her; he had only taught her to love him. So Doreen had reasoned night after night, before she cried herself to sleep.

But one day last summer Tom had told her that he lived in Cranford, and she had promptly replied that a cousin of hers lived there, too. Tom, it appeared, knew vaguely who Miss Martha Cornish was, and he voiced the hope that Doreen would sometime visit her cousin. Doreen, that day, had hoped so, too.

Of course, when she learned that she must of necessity come to Cranford, she had expected that eventually she would see Tom, but she had also expected that she would then bow to him, serenely and remotely, perhaps from Miss Cornish's car. For whatever happened, she was determined that Tom Lawrence should never suspect that she still loved him and would go on loving him all the rest of her life.

Even now, she reasoned, she could not go to him for assistance. He would think—oh, yes, he would think she was making an excuse to see him, trying to renew their old relationship, which he had blithely repudiated. He had wanted to be through with her when he left Maine. That being the case, she told herself doggedly, she would sooner freeze to death than force herself upon him.

HAVING reached this bleak conclusion, Doreen noticed two girls who had paused to greet each other not six feet from her. One was dark and vivacious with merry brown eyes; the other had ash-blond hair, a pert little nose, and a laughing mouth. Both girls were exceedingly well-dressed. The fair-haired girl had a red rose pinned into the soft fur collar of her coat.

Mutely Doreen looked at them. They made her think of the stately old houses she had seen in this little town; houses of the sort from which they had undoubtedly come. They made her think of great blazing fireplaces with Christmas stockings hanging above them and tables loaded with gifts tied with bright ribbon; they made her think of all the things she now so starkly lacked: love, protection, self-assurance, safety. Oh, how very safe, how very self-assured those two girls were! What would they think if they knew she had nowhere to go and no money?

But she wasn't a beggar, Doreen told herself fiercely. She couldn't tell them, nor anybody!

"Are you all ready for Christmas?" the fair-haired girl was asking.

"Well, I thought I was," the other

returned, "but now I find a few more packages to wrap. You know how it is."

"Don't I, just! And I'll bet Tom will come home to-night with all his presents for me to tie up!"

"Patty Lawrence," the dark-haired girl protested, "do you mean to say that you spoil that brother of yours as much as ever? He's through college, now, and earning his own living; so—"

Doreen did not hear the rest. She was scrutinizing with veiled eagerness the girl with the ash-blond hair, the girl who was Patty Lawrence, Tom Lawrence's sister!

Doreen had frequently heard him speak of her. And so that lovely, happy-looking girl was Patty Lawrence! But since she was Tom's sister, why shouldn't she be happy? Standing there apart from the other two girls, Doreen felt even more hopelessly, achingly lonely than before. She looked at the small package under Patty Lawrence's arm! In the upper left-hand corner it was marked with her name and address — 19 Pittsfield Street. Not, Doreen reminded herself grimly, that she wanted to know where they lived. The Lawrences would be troubled with no visits from her.

She turned, then, and walked rapidly down the street.

How cold it was! And it was beginning to snow. She slackened her pace a little. Why hurry, since she had nowhere on earth to go?

If only she were not so hungry she might be able to think better. For, of course she must think of something—somewhere to stay.

And then, for the first time in her life, Doreen saw a lunch wagon. She did not at once know what it was; but the signs told her. And she looked quickly away. Food! Oh, she mustn't think about it yet! She had so little money—and, after all, she had eaten breakfast.

Needless to say, though, she looked back at the signs. It was that second glance which brought her to an abrupt halt. She even set her suitcase down upon the pavement.

One of the signs read, "Ladies Invited."

Invited! Oh, how altogether wonderful! They were offering free lunches to ladies, evidently, because it was Christmas time. Possibly it was a sort of—sort of advertisement for the wagon.

Anyway, Doreen quickly decided that "Ladies Invited" sign was a Heaven-sent invitation. Nobody could need more to be invited to lunch than she did. She could get something to eat and still keep her little bit of money. Perhaps, for thirty-eight cents, somebody might be induced to take her in to-night, since it was Christmas Eve. And to-morrow night Cousin Martha might possibly come back.

Trying thus valiantly to allay her fears, Doreen mounted the steps and entered the lunch wagon.

The interior was delightfully warm, and it was all decorated for Christmas. There was a great red bell directly over the stool she selected and climbed up on with a sigh of relief. Also, there was a bowl of holly on the counter. There were no other customers besides herself at the moment, but the man behind the counter looked kindly, even jovial. Uncertainly, Doreen smiled at him.

"I—I'd like something to eat," she confided. "I saw your sign—"

"Yes, of course—certainly, miss," he responded, pointing to the framed

menu on the wall. "What will you have."

It would never do, Doreen told herself sternly, to order too lavishly. After all, she wasn't paying for this luncheon. But, oh, how hungry she was—and how heavenly good the food smelled! Then, too, she hadn't any idea when she would eat again.

She finally ordered a sustaining luncheon, gratefully conscious of the fact that she did not have to pay the prices which followed her choices on the framed menu.

Things did happen sometimes—miraculous things like this, she reflected. Here she was, so hungry and so afraid to spend what little money she had, and she was mercifully being fed. It was wonderful.

Perhaps, after all, she might even have some sort of Christmas. If only she *could!*

"Missing one Christmas out of your life is like—like losing ten years," she thought wistfully, and began to remember the Christmases she had spent on the farm, all warmth and laughter and the scent of pine. There had been gifts, too, from Aunt Esther, Cousin Martha, and the girls in the village. And on Christmas night her own and Aunt Esther's friends had driven out to the farm, usually in sleighs, to tell stories around the fire and play games. It had all been so happy, so perfect.

Of course, though, she had known that this year everything would be different. She had not expected any presents—except, perhaps, one from Cousin Martha.

Then Doreen's luncheon was placed on the counter. She looked down at it with purple-blue eyes that had widened delightfully. Why, she *was* getting a Christmas present! It was right here before her!

"Oh, thank you, very much!" she said gratefully. "It — it looks lovely—and—and—Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas to you, miss," the man responded with a smile. Inwardly he reflected, "Funny little kid. She looks grown up, and yet there's something about her which makes you feel that she's just lost her nurse."

At least, he was gratified to note, she was enjoying her lunch, and she didn't seem to be in any hurry about it, either. That was funny, too. Everybody was hurrying to-day.

But Doreen had decided to stay just as long as she could in the comforting warmth of the lunch wagon. And she made her luncheon last as long as she could, lingering over the last crumb of her chocolate éclair.

Eventually, however, she arose, picked up her suitcase, smiled at the man and said again, "Thank you. I enjoyed it so much. Good-by."

The man looked considerably surprised.

"It is fifty-five cents all together," he told her.

Doreen stared at him, her lips parted in astonishment.

"Wh-what did you say?" she faltered.

"Fifty-five cents," he repeated. "You pay me."

"But—but I thought the sign said, 'Ladies Invited'—"

"Huh?" the man asked blankly. "What? Yes, of course it does."

"Then—then why do I pay fifty-five cents for my lunch?"

"Why do you?" the man repeated, more than ever deeply puzzled. He added, "Why wouldn't you? I haven't overcharged you."

"But the sign: it says '*Ladies Invited.*' So I—I thought you—really were inviting them."

The man was staring at her, now, and his suspicion was giving way to honest amazement.

"No," he said at last, "that sign is just a polite way of telling ladies that it's all right for them to come in here. See? But if you haven't the money—"

"Oh, yes—that is, no, I can't pay for all of my lunch, but I can pay for some of it," Doreen hurriedly assured him, a bright flush of humiliation staining her face. "I have—only thirty-eight cents with me."

"Awh, now say!" the man protested. "Don't you suppose I can trust you for seventeen cents? You can just bring it in some time later."

And Doreen, trying to smile, emptied the contents of her purse on the counter.

"Good-by, miss," the man said. "Wish you a very merry Christmas."

MERRY Christmas! Doreen could have laughed hysterically as she closed the door of the lunch wagon behind her.

Now where could she go? Who would take her in without a cent in her pocket? Just nobody.

The snow was coming down in thick white flakes. The ground was covered with it. It was almost dark, too. Fear, colder than the snow and more pitiless, gripped the girl by the throat; desolation, stark and menacing, came creeping toward her out of the dusk. Yet it was Christmas Eve!

Christmas, the time when even the heaviest heart is lifted a little by the magic which charges the air, streams through the stars, and sings through our veins; the time for peace and joy and love and laughter; the time safely inevitable, which rests upon the earth like a benediction.

But to be homeless and friendless on Christmas Eve is surely the most acute form of desolation. Alone Doreen wandered aimlessly through the snow-covered streets of that little town, looked into the brightly lighted shop windows, watched the people hurrying from shops into luxurious motors where heaps of gorgeously covered packages could be glimpsed through the glass windows, and she listened to the echo of laughter. Frequently she drew her thin coat closer about her and shivered; sometimes she wondered if she might be asleep, the prey of a peculiarly harrowing dream. A feeling of unreality was taking possession of her. And she was so very cold.

Tom Lawrence — she would go to him. He would lend her some money until Cousin Martha returned. Then, after she had paid him, she need never see him again. She had, she remembered, thought she would rather die than seek him out, but it would take such a long time to die, and her suitcase was so heavy, she was so tired, so cold.

She was passing just then a small bookshop, and it occurred to her that some one inside should be able to direct her to Pittsfield Street. Anyway, it would be warm in the shop. She turned and entered.

The proprietor of the little shop was both kind and helpful. She directed Doreen to the Lawrence house, and allowed her to wash her face and her cold, blue little hands.

About twenty minutes later Doreen started out again, this time with at least an objective.

But Pittsfield Street was, it soon developed, a long way off. It was completely dark now, but it had stopped snowing, and over Doreen's head there shone the biggest, brightest star she had ever seen. The Christmas star.

Did it, she wondered, look bigger and brighter than ever before because she was all alone here in the darkness? Would it guide her to Tom Lawrence, as it had once guided the wise men to a blessed Baby and to a Mother who had had, also, no place to lay her head?

Perhaps, Doreen considered, if she couldn't find Tom, she, too, might find a stable where she could curl up and try to sleep in the hay . . . But there weren't any stables around here, only garages, where some one would be sure to find her.

She had left the shops far behind, now, and ahead she could see, on each side of the street, irregular clusters of tiny, bright-colored lights. As she drew nearer she discovered that these lights were twinkling through small evergreen trees set close against the houses. They made the street look as though a band of Christmas fairies had been at work upon it.

And if the houses looked like this outside, what, Doreen wondered, must they look like *inside*?

Suppose — suppose Tom had loved her, and had brought her to live in a place like this, where Christmastime was one long, glad carol!

But—she shivered again and tried to draw the meager collar of her coat closer about her neck—Tom didn't love her. And she mustn't think about that, now, or she would never be able to go to him for help.

At last she found 19 Pittsfield Street—the Lawrence house. It was a great, rambling, homelike white frame house with ample ground around it, twinkling lights in its shrubbery, and a great holly wreath tied on the door with red ribbon.

Doreen had mounted the steps and raised one trembling hand to the door-bell when she noticed that the door itself was not latched. Suppose — oh, just suppose it would be possible for her to slip inside and find Tom without letting any other member of the family know!

Cautiously, almost breathlessly, she opened the door, slipped inside, and closed it behind her.

SHE was in a large hall now, festooned with laurel and fragrant with the scent of pine and Christmas roses. Through the doorway on her right she could see a large drawing-room, apparently empty. Should she go in, Doreen wondered, or should she go back outside and ring the bell? But her feet and hands were achingly cold, and it was so very cold out on that porch. In here it was heavenly warm. Somewhere she could hear logs crackling in an open fireplace. That decided her. Frightened though she was at her own temerity, she stepped hesitantly across the threshold.

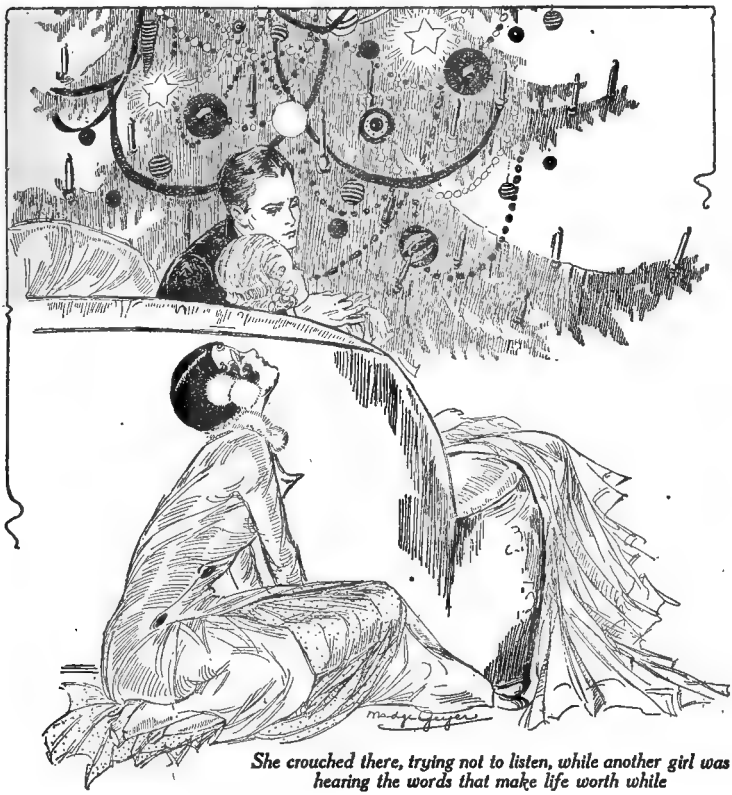
Such a room! Like the hall, its woodwork was old ivory, and there was an even more poignant scent of pine and roses. Doreen tried to look everywhere at once: at the priceless old pieces of furniture combined with delightfully comfortable chairs at the great, blazing fireplace; at the ivory mantel above it, holding antique, prismed candelabra in which tall white candles were burning; at the concert grand piano; at the vases filled with dark red roses; at the bowls full of holly and mistletoe. All these things Doreen saw and devoured with her home-hungry, purple-blue eyes; but it was the Christmas tree which drew her forward until she was standing before it entranced.

Tall and symmetrical it was, that tree, and gleaming with gold, silver, and flashes of jewel-like brilliance.

Fairylike, mystical, symbolic of the witchery which lurks in the very heart of a great, glad day. Again Doreen's glance swept the room. Oh, they had caught it here—all the wonder, all the magic that is Christmas!

Just then a voice broke the stillness, a feminine voice, upstairs in the hall, evidently, talking over the telephone.

"Hello," it said impatiently. "Is that you, Gertrude? Oh, I thought you never would answer! I wanted to



She crouched there, trying not to listen, while another girl was hearing the words that make life worth while

And in a few minutes, even if she found Tom, she would have to leave it all, to go—where?

But where was Tom? How could she find him? The house was very quiet. Was there no one at home?

tell you to come over as soon as you can to-morrow. Don't wait until just before dinner." There was a brief pause, followed by the same voice: "All right, that will be excellent. That's just what I want you to do."

Another pause, and then: "No, Tom isn't home. He went away on business, you know, and the return of that son of mine is always a little uncertain. We did think he would be back last night, but now, although we're going to be awfully disappointed, we hardly expect him before to-morrow—"

Doreen heard no more. There, before the blazing fire, she felt suddenly cold again with fear.

Tom wasn't home! He wasn't *expected* home until to-morrow!

Where must she go, then—out into the cold and the dark?

The doorbell rang. Doreen glanced frantically about. Oh, she couldn't leave this room just yet; she *couldn't!*

She heard a door open in the rear of the house, followed by the sound of approaching footsteps. Some one was coming! They would find her—but they mustn't!

Afterward she wondered how she happened to do what she then did; but at the time she did not reason. She was like a frightened rabbit scurrying to cover.

There was, across one of the corners near the fireplace, an old-fashioned sofa upholstered in moss-green velour. The lower part of it just cleared the floor, and its back was high. To Doreen the corner behind it offered refuge, warmth, and rest. Without stopping to consider, she picked up her suitcase, darted noiselessly across the room, climbed over the top of the sofa, and slipped down to the floor behind it.

There was room, without crowding, for both her and the suitcase! For a little while at least she was safe, and she could keep warm. As compared to that cold, dark street this room was heaven.

She heard some one open the front door, and then a fresh young voice: "Angie, did you fasten the door? I left it unlatched. Not really open, you know, but just so I could get in. I only went down to the mail box."

"Oh, no, miss," the maid assured her, "I didn't close it. I've been busy helping cook."

"Well, I presume it blowed shut."

Some one came into the drawing-room, then, and Doreen held her breath. Footsteps crossed to the fire, and halted. All was still again. After what seemed to Doreen hours of waiting, she ventured to peer through the broad band of carving along the top of the sofa, and found to her relief that she could see the entire room.

A girl with ash-blond hair was seated right near her, before the fire, writing something on the back of an envelope. She was Patty Lawrence, Tom's sister.

And she looked kind, Doreen noted. Surely if she should throw herself on this girl's mercy she could make her understand; surely Patty Lawrence would help her. And yet, Doreen knew, she could not possibly arise from behind a sofa in some one's drawing-room and ask for assistance. The idea was unthinkable. She must, she decided, stay where she was as long as she could; then, at a safe moment, she must creep out of the house. It would be time enough after that to determine her next move.

AGAIN the doorbell rang, and when the door was opened, apparently by the maid, Doreen heard a masculine voice in the hall.

Patty Lawrence heard it, too. She jumped to her feet, dropping the envelope upon which she had been writing, and turned toward the door. But

the envelope, striking the stool at her feet, had glanced off and slipped, on the polished floor, under the sofa. There it lay, right beside Doreen. She glanced down at it and, in the candlelight from the mantel, read, quite without thinking, what Patty Lawrence had written.

In a slanting, individual hand she had scrawled:

"Mrs. David Leigh Welling. Mrs. D. L. Welling. Patricia Welling. Patty Welling."

What did it mean? Doreen wondered. And then she understood: Patty Lawrence was in love with a man named David Leigh Welling—and she was trying to see how his name would look if it were also her name.

Some one came into the drawing-room, and Doreen looked quickly back through the carving. The newcomer was a tall man with dark hair and grave dark eyes.

"Hello, David," Patty, who had been searching in vain on the floor for her envelope, greeted him. "I was just thinking about ringing for tea. Wouldn't you like some?"

"I'm afraid not," he returned with obvious regret. "I can stay only a minute. I—stopped to tell you that I'm going away to-night and—and therefore won't be able to have dinner with you to-morrow."

"Oh!" said Patty. "You're—going away? But—why, David?"

"Because I—well, I half promised to visit some people over Christmas, and now I find that they're expecting me."

"I—see," the girl said slowly.

She turned away in order that David might not see her face. But Doreen saw it, and her heart ached fiercely.

So this was David Welling, the man Patty Lawrence loved—and he didn't love her; he was going away!

Just then the maid came to the drawing-room door.

"Miss Patty," she said, "somebody wants to talk to you on the telephone."

"Thank you, Angie, and—excuse me a minute, will you, please, David?" Patty said, and left the room.

David Welling, therefore, could not be blamed for supposing that he was quite alone. Certainly he could never have suspected that two purple-blue eyes were indignantly regarding him from behind the sofa. And so he lifted Patty's coat from where she had flung it on one of the chairs, looked down at it for several seconds, and then, suddenly, buried his face in its soft fur collar.

Fascinated, Doreen watched him. After all, he *did* love Patty Lawrence! And yet he was going away from her. Also, Doreen was somehow convinced, he was not coming back. If something were not done— But something *must* be done!

Impulsively she reached for the letter Patty had written upon, and, with all her force, sent it sliding across the floor in David's direction.

Hearing it, he lowered the coat from his face, looked down and saw the letter. He glanced questioningly about the room, apparently concluding that the envelope had dropped from the table.

Would he pick it up? Doreen wondered breathlessly. And if he did, would he look at it, or throw it carelessly aside?

But—yes, he was picking up the letter, and—oh, *yes*, he was reading what was written on it!

At that moment Patty came back into the room. Simultaneously David dropped her coat from one hand, and,

with the other, slipped the envelope into his pocket.

"Why, David," Patty remarked, pausing before him, "what has happened? You look as though you'd been stealing sheep."

"I — oh, I — no, nothing has happened," David assured her. "But I— I've just got to tell you something, dear: I love you. I shouldn't tell you, I know that, because I'm not making enough money. But—"

"Oh," said Patty softly, "but tell me just the same, David! *Tell* me!"

And then Doreen remembered to look away and cover her ears with her hands. It was hard, though, to remain that way. At last she removed one hand far enough from her ear to hear David ask, "Are you sure you love me, darling? Are you sure you want to marry me and live on what I make?"

"Oh, David," Patty assured him, "I'd die if I couldn't! Suppose you hadn't asked me! And you weren't going to do it. You intended to go away and leave me."

"But that was because I'd decided it was the only decent thing I could do. And then—well, I just couldn't leave you. But what will your mother say? Tom will be all right, I think—"

"And so will mother. She likes you awfully, darling. As for Tom, you know *him*. Then, too, he's in love himself. He moons around all the time—over Beatrice Green, of course. Although I don't think he has asked her to marry him yet—"

"Oh, well," David suggested, "let's not talk about Tom and Beatrice; let's talk about us, or—let me kiss you again."

Doreen did not even have to try any more not to listen. She crouched down in the corner, staring at the dark green velvet wall of sofa with unseeing eyes. Tom loved another girl!

NOT, of course, she remembered, that she now supposed he would ever love her, or that she had not known he would one day love somebody else. But to know for sure that he had fallen in love, and so soon after he had kissed her—that was different.

Oh, why had she learned about it to-night? Weren't things black enough at present? But then, if she hadn't listened to a conversation not intended for her ears, she would not have heard about Tom. Perhaps—here her lips quivered and two large tears rolled down her cheeks — perhaps it served her right. And yet she had, in a way, given David to Patty. She had made him understand that Patty loved him enough to try to see how her name would look if she were married to him. And she had felt, just then, as though she were paying rather beautiful board for this corner behind the sofa.

"Oh, I'm so happy, David!" she heard Patty say. "Come on, dear, let's sing Christmas carols. If we don't I'll probably explode with joy."

A moment later there were a few chords struck upon the piano, and Patty and David began to sing:

"Wonderful night! Wonderful night!
Angels and shining immortals,
Thronging Thine ebony portals,
Laugh in a dream of delight—
Wonderful, wonderful night!"

So sang Patty Lawrence through the pine-and-rose-scented air of her mother's drawing-room, while, hidden in a corner of that same room, another girl, homeless and penniless, crouched lower upon the floor, folded her arms upon her suitcase, and cried desolately.

On went the carol:

"Wonderful night! Wonderful night!
Sweet be Thy rest to the weary,
Making the dull heart and dreary
Laugh in a dream of delight—
Wonderful, wonderful night!"

"Oh, make her stop so that I can get away!" Doreen prayed frantically. "I'm glad she's happy—I'm *truly* glad, but make her stop, now, because I can't *bear* it!"

And Patty did stop. She had heard, it appeared, a well-known voice in the hall.

"There's Tom!" she exclaimed.

A second later Doreen, with her heart hammering madly against her ribs, heard that far too well-remembered voice.

"Hello, there," Tom said.

Doreen peered hungrily through the carved top of the sofa—and saw him. He was standing where the firelight played upon his fair hair, and he was shaking hands with David Welling.

It seemed to Doreen that her heart leaped into her eyes as she watched and listened. Patty was telling him about her engagement to David, and, before she had finished, their mother, a tall, dignified looking woman with white hair and humorous brown eyes very like Tom's, came into the room. Then Patty told them both that she and David were to be married.

And Mrs. Lawrence gave no indication of objecting to David as a son-in-law. She kissed Patty rather solemnly, while Tom wrung David's hand.

"I'm glad, old man," Tom was saying. "If you really want Pat—although, to be perfectly honest, I don't see why you should. Her nose turns up, you know."

"Brute!" said Patty, and, at the same time, beamed happily upon her brother. "Don't pay any attention to him, David," she continued. "He is probably off girls because Beatrice—" And then she paused, staring toward the sofa with wide, startled eyes.

"Patty, what is it?" David asked quickly.

"There—there's some one behind the sofa," she told them in a frightened whisper.

Tom glanced that way and grinned.

"You're seeing things, youngster," he decided. "Your engagement has gone to your head—"

"No," Patty interrupted, clinging now to David. "I tell you there *is* some one there. I saw the top of his black head, and then he moved. You can't see him now, but he's—there!"

And Doreen? She was cowering in her corner in wild dismay, and her heart was beating so hard that it seemed about to tear its way through her slim body.

Oh, she had been mad, *mad!* In her eagerness to see Tom she had forgotten to make sure that her head did not appear above the sofa! And now what would happen?

Footsteps approached her hiding place. Nearer they came, terrifyingly nearer . . .

Then Tom's face appeared over the edge of the sofa.

As she looked up at him, Doreen felt as though her heart had stopped beating. She seemed to be sinking into a dense fog, through which Tom was receding. The fog grew darker, until at last everything about her was as black as the night from which she had taken refuge.

WHEN she began to regain consciousness her eyelids felt too heavy to open. She had no idea where she was, and she seemed

to be listening to haunting and yet satisfying words which were echoing in her ear:

> Sweet be Thy rest to the weary,
> Making the dull heart and dreary
> Laugh in a dream of delight—
> Wonderful, wonderful night!

Then she heard another and more substantial voice—Tom's.

"I love her, mother," he was saying firmly. "You see, I met her last summer in Maine, and I've known for several months that I love her. And that's where I've been—up in Maine, trying to find Doreen. I learned that her aunt had died, and that she had come to stay with a cousin here in Cranford. What the blessed child is doing in this house I can't imagine, but she *is* here, and that's enough. Now, if Dr. Jamison would only come—"

"He said he'd come as soon as ever he could," Patty reported in a hushed voice. She added, "Your Doreen does look sweet, Tom. But I must say I'm dying to know why she was hiding behind our sofa."

"Yes, it is strange, Tom," Mrs. Lawrence demurred. "How could you explain it?"

"I can't, of course, mother, but I know that Doreen can—and satisfactorily."

Then Doreen opened her eyes, and it seemed to Mrs. Lawrence, who was bending above her, that they were brighter than the Christmas stars.

"I—I came here because, when I got to Cranford, I found that my cousin had gone away," Doreen explained. "And I—haven't any money. Not—not any at all. So I came to Tom, because he is the only person I know here. Then I found your front door open, and—and walked in. But I heard you talking over the telephone, saying that Tom wasn't home, and that you didn't expect him back today; so I was going away again because I—couldn't ask strangers to lend me money; but then I heard some one coming, and hid behind the sofa. I—you see, I didn't want you to find me here. I—I thought you might not believe that I really did know Tom."

"You poor child!" Mrs. Lawrence exclaimed softly, and none too steadily. "Any one would believe you, my dear, who had looked into your eyes. But, now, suppose I leave you with Tom until the doctor comes?"

"But I don't need a doctor," Doreen began. "I feel wonderful, now."

"We will let the doctor himself decide that," Mrs. Lawrence returned. "Though I think myself that he will merely tell us to put you to bed and see that you get a good night's sleep—"

"Here?" Doreen asked in hushed tones. "You mean—I am to stay in—in this house—"

"Yes, right in this house—"

"If you're going, mother?" Tom interposed suggestively.

And then Mrs. Lawrence, Patty, and David went away.

Tom knelt beside the sofa, and gathered Doreen up in his arms.

"Oh, you precious baby!" he said huskily. "Suppose you hadn't come here; suppose anything had happened to you!"

"Do you—do you really love me, Tom?" she asked, her tone filled with wonder. "I—just can't seem to believe it, you see. I thought—at least I heard some one say that you loved a girl named Beatrice—"

"Who said that?" Tom wanted to know. "Beatrice Green and I are good friends, but that's all. I've never thought of her in that way, and she, too, loves somebody else."

"Oh, well, then—it doesn't matter," Doreen decided. "If you really do love *me*—"

"I worship you," Tom said fervently. "I didn't know it last summer, that's all. But—do you love me, sweetheart?"

Doreen opened wide her purple-blue eyes.

"But of course I do! Why, how could I help it? Oh, Tom, I love you—terribly!"

He crushed her to him, covering her face and throat with kisses that came to rest at last upon her sweet, tremulous mouth.

"Then you'll marry me, won't you?" he pleaded. "Oh, darling, I can never let you go now that I've found you again!"

But Doreen, with her arms tightly clasped about his neck, made it plain enough that he need never part from her again so long as they both should live.

"It's like a miracle!" she marveled a few minutes later. "I was so desperately unhappy. There didn't seem to be any hope for me at all. I never dreamed that you loved me, I was all alone on the day before Christmas, and I hadn't even a place to sleep tonight. Yet now I'm here, on Christmas Eve, in your arms! It's—it's like the carol Patty was singing while I was hiding behind the sofa. It was something about this night 'Making the dull heart and dreary laugh in a dream of delight.' And then it ended, 'Wonderful, wonderful night!' And oh, darling, it *is* a wonderful night! Just hold me close a minute and let me try to realize that it's really Christmas Eve, and that you love me."

And so Tom held her very close, while the fire and candlelight fell softly upon the gracious old drawing-room which was scented, now, with pine and roses, because to-morrow was Christmas Day.

XMAS WORSHIPPER

GIRLHOOD in the choir-loft in a flowered frock—
Poppies, pastel-tinted, strewn
On gleaming white moiré—
Pointed bodice, straight and slim,
Dresden shepherdess hem-line trim;
Costume and costumed proudly prim
As some ancestral portrait dim—
O, that my heart had daring for its sweet, wild whim
This muted throng of listeners to shock,
Adown the quiet aisle to walk alone,
Reach out to pluck the blossom-girl beyond the altar's rim,
Kiss from her parted lips that hallowed Xmas hymn;
Seize flowered frock and singer for my own
Exquisite bouquet
And carry it away!

—*Alice Milburn*

Kitty gave a laugh of delight. "How long have you been there?" she asked

Twice Promised

By MAUD McCURDY WELCH

MRS. KELLY was reading the afternoon paper when a startled exclamation burst from her lips. She stared again over her horn-rimmed spectacles at the item in the personal column:

> If the daughter of Katherine Dare, whose maiden name was Katherine Nolan, will communicate with Messrs. Lubbock & Mann, Attorneys, Randolph Building, City, she will learn something to her advantage.

For a moment the woman sat thinking. She was an avaricious creature, and she had no doubt that this advertisement involved money. Very carefully she cut out the item, placed it in her purse and then went into the kitchen. A slight, fair-haired girl sat at a table peeling potatoes. Mrs. Kelly took a chair near her.

"Kitty, you've never told me about your people. Haven't you any relatives left at all?"

Kitty looked up, puzzled. It was unusual for Mrs. Kelly to take the slightest interest in her. As a rule, the woman hardly spoke to her except to reprove her for not getting the work done sooner, or give her extra tasks besides the ordinary housekeeping. For a moment the girl did not answer, and Mrs. Kelly tapped the table impatiently. "My parents died when I was a tiny

baby," Kitty began. "The first thing I remember was the gray walls of the orphanage."

"Hadn't you other relatives?"

Kitty shook her head.

"But there must have been some one!" the woman urged.

"If I have any relatives anywhere I never heard of them," was the sad answer.

"That chain you wear around your neck—let me see it." It was all the woman could do to keep the eagerness from her voice. Kitty unfastened it and handed it to her, and Mrs. Kelly examined it with curious, avaricious eyes.

The chain was a delicate thing of dull gold with a small, dainty locket in the shape of a heart. It did not open, but on the outside there were engraved the unmistakable initials K. N.

"They told me at the orphanage that it was my mother's. I think she must have worn it when she was a girl," Kitty said softly.

A look of satisfaction crept into Mrs. Kelly's eyes as she handed the locket back. She tried to soften her tone when she spoke again, but no matter how she tried, it sounded rasping. "I've been thinking things over, Kitty, and I've decided it will be all right for you and George to get married."

The girl turned pale. As long as his mother had objected, she had felt safe from George Kelly's obnoxious attentions, but now things would be even worse than before.

Life had certainly been difficult enough for Kitty, since the day she had left the orphanage in town and had come out here to this tumble-down old summer hotel to work for Mrs. Kelly for her room and board. But nothing on earth could induce her to marry George Kelly. Nothing! He was a big, coarse, loutish sort of man, and the girl disliked him as much as she feared him.

Mrs. Kelly again attempted to make her voice coaxing. "George loves you. And he's a fine man. Any girl would be proud to have him for a husband."

"I wouldn't marry him if—if he were the last man in the world!" Kitty said with sudden vehemence.

"What!" The woman almost screamed out the word. Her heavy face was suddenly mottled with purplish, angry spots.

But Kitty stood her ground. "I wouldn't think of marrying him. I don't love him. I couldn't."

"Hoity-toity! What d'you know about love?" Mrs. Kelly scoffed. She walked with offended dignity to the door, turned. "Well, we'll see about that when George comes back. You're only a silly little girl, and you're in my charge, and I know what's best for you. So think that over, my fine young lady!"

LEFT alone, Kitty went on peeling potatoes, but tears stood in her eyes, and fear prodded at her heart. Mrs. Kelly was not her legal guardian. Kitty did not believe she could be forced into a marriage with George, but she knew her position was a terrifying one, since she had no friends of influence, nor any money of her own. And Mrs. Kelly was a shrewd and determined woman.

Things were not quite so bad when George Kelly was away, for then his mother spent most of the time lying in bed reading paper-backed novels, and as long as Kitty did what was expected of her, she was left alone. At such times she was not altogether unhappy. She had the woods and wild flowers right at her door, and down at The Corners, the nearest settlement, she had

a friend in Sally Winters, the crippled postmistress, who gave her books to read, and talked to her as a real mother would. And there was the dog, Shep. Kitty found him one day lost in the woods when a mere puppy, and on him she lavished all the starved affection of a hungry and lonely heart.

And, like all girls, Kitty had her dreams. Some day love would come. A handsome lover who would find her and take her away to a fairy world far from the shrewish tongue of Mrs. Kelly, and the evil that lurked in the eyes of George Kelly, her son.

There were times when life seemed dreadfully unfair, times when Kitty wondered why some of the good things of the world couldn't have been hers. Other girls had parents who adored them, brothers and sisters, dainty frocks, parties and dancing. Kitty had never known any of these joys.

But it was not often she indulged in self-pity. She was naturally buoyant of disposition, and life even in this desolate ramshackle old place could be a joyous thing. If only George Kelly would not annoy her with his love making, she felt as if she might have been contented as things were.

No amount of household drudgery ever seemed to dim the freshness of Kitty's beauty. Her figure was straight and lissome, and there was something more than mere beauty in the clear oval of her face with its lovely arched brows and proud small nose. There was character there and poise, a certain dainty refinement, which Mrs. Kelly could not help recognizing and resenting, coarse and uncouth as she was.

As long as the woman had believed the girl to be friendless and alone, she had tried to persuade her son that a marriage with her was not desirable. But since reading the item in the newspaper, she had changed her mind. That night George came home quite late. Kitty, lying in her lumpy bed down the hall from Mrs. Kelly's quarters, heard his heavy footsteps, and could not keep from shuddering. She did not know that he and his mother talked long into the night, plotting some way to coerce the girl into marriage, but she did know that to-morrow George would make himself unpleasant again, and she dreaded the coming of the day. She decided she would go to The Corners and tell Miss Sally her troubles, and ask her advice. With this thought she fell into a troubled sleep.

Early the next morning, when she went into the kitchen to prepare breakfast, she discovered there was no bacon. George always demanded bacon and eggs for his breakfast; he would be furious. There was nothing to do but to go to the store and get it, trusting to luck that neither he nor his mother would awaken before she could have returned.

She darted out of the house and started off at a light run. She was in such haste that when she reached the little swinging bridge over the gulch she did not slacken her speed, and the result was, she almost ran over a young man who was sitting on the edge fishing. He recovered his balance laughingly, and cried out: "Hey, there, what's the mad rush?" But Kitty was too intent on her errand to heed. For a moment the young man stared after her. Then he jumped into a gray roadster that was parked near the bridge, and started after her flying figure.

Because he swerved the car around almost in front of her, there was nothing for Kitty to do but stop. She stared at him bewilderedly, and he smiled. "Say, if you're in such a hurry

I'll drive you where you're going. You'll get there sooner," he said impulsively.

"Oh, will you? I am in a—a most frightful hurry!" she said breathlessly. In almost no time they had reached the store and were on their way back. In the unexpected thrill of sitting beside this blue-eyed, blond young man, Kitty almost forgot the bad-tempered pair at the hotel. Suddenly she remembered, and the words came from her with a little gasp. "Oh, I do hope George won't be awake."

"Who's George?" her companion asked interestedly.

"He's the—the son of the woman I work for. I had to get some bacon for his breakfast. That's why I was hurrying so."

"He's not—not a sweetheart, or anything like that?" the young man asked as he slowed down the car. Kitty shook her head, while a flush covered her face. Her companion smiled audaciously. "Do you know, I'm most awfully glad of that! But why do you work for this—er—George's mother? It doesn't seem fair that you should work for anybody."

Kitty smiled. "Some of us have to work, though. We can't all be born with silver spoons, and raised in the lap of luxury."

"Oh, yes, of course," he admitted. "But *you* oughtn't to have to. There ought to be something somebody could do about it."

"I'm afraid there isn't!" The girl laughed tremulously—she could not help being thrilled at the tone of his voice; it filled her with such exhilarating happiness. She glanced at him shyly, and found him looking at her with a gay smile that was almost tender. Her heart seemed to skip a beat; she had to drop her eyes. "I wish you didn't have to go back," he said. "We could take a long drive and—er—get acquainted."

THEY were at the swinging bridge now, and he stopped the car. "But of course I'm going to see you again." He helped her out, and Kitty said archly: "Do you really want to?"

"I don't think I ever wanted anything quite so much in my life," he answered earnestly. "You see I—I didn't believe there were any girls left in the world like you. And you haven't yet told me your name."

"Kitty Dare. And now I've got to run. George will be—"

"Darn George!" came that laughing voice. "Tell him to go sit on a cactus spine! Listen," he went on eagerly, "I'm staying at my uncle's over at Westglow, vacationing. If I come back to-morrow, will you be somewhere around? Will I be seeing you?" There was no mistaking the eagerness that lay behind his words.

"Promise," he urged.

She smiled. "I'll try," and then ran across the bridge toward the house. She was conscious that he watched her out of sight. When she reached the kitchen door, George was standing there scowling. He made a gesture toward the car with a thick finger. "What's that city chap doing around here? Where'd you meet him?"

"He drove me to the store because I was in a hurry. I—never saw him before," Kitty explained.

"Tell that to Sweeney!" George sneered. He followed her about the kitchen as she hastily prepared breakfast. "If he knows what's good for him, he'll make himself scarce around here. You're my girl, and no city chap's going to get fresh with you. Not if I know it!"

"I'm nothing to you and never will be! And you know it!" Kitty said defiantly.

He gave a grating laugh. "Says you! Come on, sit down; we might as well talk this over like friends. Ma's given her consent, and now there's no reason why we shouldn't get married. You're over eighteen."

"When I marry a man, he's got to be at least respectable," Kitty cried, forgetting caution. That moment Mrs. Kelly came in. At first her eyes were malevolent but she controlled her anger, and said cajolingly: "Kitty, you don't realize what an advantage it would be for you to be George's wife. You like pretty clothes and things, and going into the city to picture shows, and all that. You wouldn't even have to do the housework; you could take things easy and enjoy life. And you're all alone in the world. You need a lawful protector."

Kitty's eyes traveled from the coarse face of Mrs. Kelly to the still coarser face of her son, with its thick lips and sensual features. She was trembling inwardly, but she kept her voice firm. "I'll never, never be his wife. I'd die first!"

"All these fool notions come from that book learning and poetry reading you've been doing with that old maid over at The Corners," Mrs. Kelly said vindictively. "I'll stop that!" She put her hand on George's arm. "Don't worry, son. She'll come to her senses some day."

After breakfast, George and his mother left the kitchen, much to Kitty's relief. As she went about her tasks tears came to her eyes. Miss Sally was her only real friend; the only one to whom she could go for advice, and in her sore need she had planned to go over there as soon as she was free. Would she be able to get away? George would watch her every move.

And there was Larry. At the thought of him a tremulous smile played about Kitty's mobile, lovely mouth. She had never met anybody like him before, so gay, so friendly, so—sweet. He was like the prince of her dreams. And he had wanted to see her again—had insisted on it! That seemed the most wonderful thing in the world. Just the thought of looking into his merry blue eyes again sent a little thrill all over her. But she was dreadfully afraid for him. George was violent. He might do—anything! If Larry came back she must try to warn him, send him away. Would he understand? Would she ever see him again?

All afternoon Kitty watched for her chance to slip away; it did not come. In the evening she sat out on the kitchen doorstep, with Shep snuggled against her for a long while. She listened to the dreary call of the whippoorwills, and watched the moon slowly rise over the tall elms. The beauty of the night seemed only to increase her loneliness. It was a night made for lovers—

She went into the house at last with a disconsolate sigh, climbed the uneven stairs and stealthily reached her room at the far end of the hall.

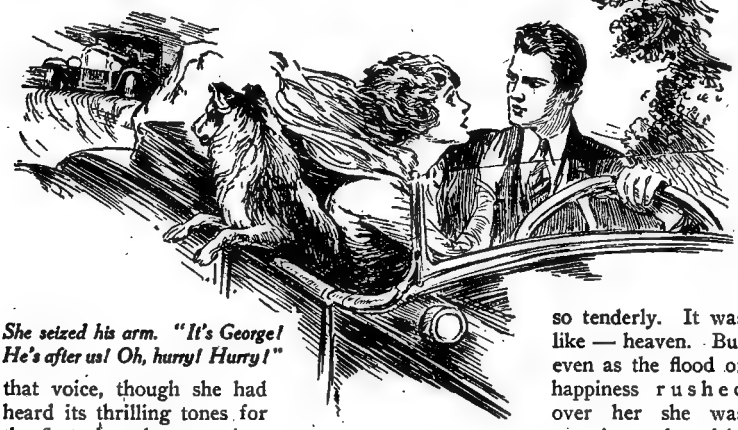
Most of the rooms of this ramshackle old hotel were untenantable because of crumbling plaster and loose floor boards. George's mother had bought the place for a nominal sum, and had made no attempt to restore it. She and George had taken the two best rooms in the building, and the only other one at all fit for use had been given to Kitty. The rest were closed. Around the entire house, both upstairs and down, there stretched an enormous porch with iron railings. Many times Kitty slipped out of her window and

sat there, looking up at the sky and dreaming dreams.

To-night she entered her room, lighted an old-fashioned lamp, and decided to read the latest book Miss Sally had loaned her. But suddenly she heard a voice singing, a husky, singularly sweet barytone with a thrumming accompaniment on the ukulele:

"The moon—is—low,
St-ars are bri-ght—"

For a moment Kitty stood transfixed before the window. She knew that voice, though she had heard its thrilling tones for the first time that morning. Was she dreaming? Though she looked carefully out into the semi-darkness, she could see nobody. Suddenly a gay voice near by exclaimed: "Hi, there, *Juliet,* come a little farther out on your balcony."



She seized his arm. "It's George! He's after us! Oh, hurry! Hurry!"

It was Larry. He was sitting in the big elm tree whose branches reached out to the edge of the upstairs porch. Kitty gave a laugh of pure delight. "However did you get there?"

He climbed out on the limb nearest the house, vaulted lightly over the iron railing, and stood by her side. "Surprised to see me?" he asked happily, as he took her arm and bent above her.

"A little." Her voice was tremulous, shy.

"Well, don't be. I have a hunch I'm going to be around here a lot. You see, I—it—seems impossible to stay away."

She was filled with ecstasy. How wonderful to stand here by his side, listening to his voice, while the moon shone down on them so softly and so tenderly. It was like — heaven. But even as the flood of happiness rushed over her she was conscious of a sickening dread and fear.

"It's the most wonderful thing that ever happened, for you to be here, but you must not come again," she said sadly. "I'm afraid of George. He might harm you."

She felt his body stiffen; his voice was rough with feeling. "What is this George to you? Tell me!"

"Nothing! Nothing!" she said brokenly. "It is only that I am afraid for you."

He raised her face to his with a sudden little laugh, and kissed her full upon the

lips. "Then there's nothing to fear. Don't you see? Nothing! I thought for one wild moment that you might be engaged to him." He made a move as if to draw her to him, to kiss her again. But she shrank back with a little cry. "Oh, Larry, you m u s t n' t—you mustn't."

"Why not?" he pleaded, low. "Don't you understand how dear you are to me already, you sweet, adorable little Kitty Dare?"

She was ready almost to forget her fears, but there came a sudden noise within the house. Was that a door slamming? She trembled. "Larry, you must go. Please—please!"

He laughed lightly. "Yes, I'll go—because if I stay, I'll surely kiss you again."

He stepped over the railing, reached for the limb of the tree. Then he turned back for a moment. "But I'm coming back, little dear, and when I do, I'll have a question to ask you. Will you promise to listen and say—yes?"

She stood in breathless silence, one hand against her heart. And the soft, exultant voice went on: "Do you understand, darling? I love you—*love you!*"

PERHAPS it had been the wind that caused the door to slam. Once back in her own room, Kitty waited breathlessly, but nothing happened. She drew a sigh of relief and turned to look at herself in the small oval mirror of the old-fashioned rickety dresser. Her eyes were starry, luminous. A soft rose flush had spread over her delicate features. Her heart was singing a tender, triumphant little song. Larry loved her! He had kissed her. He would come back and make all her dreams come true. Life had opened up its fairy gifts at last. She had been waiting for him all her life, and he had come, so simply, so quickly. Soon he would take her away, and there would no longer be any reason to fear George.

She fell asleep with a happy smile curving her lovely chiseled lips. But next morning the blow fell. Larry had early crossed the little swinging bridge, and was sitting outside under a tree playing his ukelele. Oh, if she had only made him realize his danger! What could she do now? George had been sitting at the table, glancing over the paper. He started up with a scowl.

"So there's your boy friend! I'll say that bozo's got a nerve. I've half a mind to go out and pump him full of lead. Anyway, I'll just show him what an unhealthy place this is—for city dudes."

He moved toward the door, but Kitty sprang out before him, ran swiftly across the yard, and up to Larry, her eyes wild and pleading. She was aware that George was stalking behind her, his hand on a bulge in his coat pocket. "Larry, go!" she cried. "He'll kill you! Please go at once! At once!" Her voice rose almost to a scream.

But Larry stood his ground, even smiled. "Don't worry, dear. You don't think I'm really afraid of that bird, do you?" he asked.

George was coming nearer, his red-lidded eyes full of menace. Oh, why couldn't Larry understand his danger? Why didn't he guess what George had in his pocket?

George was standing near her now, his eyes glued on the other man's tall, graceful figure, his lips drawn in a snarl. Kitty threw him a desperate glance. There was only one thing to do—only one way to save Larry. She must take it, even though it was like tearing her heart into shreds. She

moved toward George, slipped her hand under his arm, touched the hand whose fingers held the hidden pistol. She made her voice cajoling: "I'm trying to make this young man understand that we're engaged, George, dear. But he won't take me seriously. So you'll have to tell him, I guess."

A fatuous smile spread over the fellow's coarse face. So Kitty was coming to her senses at last!

"You never had a chance, bozo," he told Larry with a sneer. "So better take your walking papers, and make tracks. You understand? You ain't deaf, are you?"

Larry ignored him utterly. His eyes were on Kitty's, searching whether truth or untruth was written there. But her face was like a mask. "You can't mean this, dear," he pleaded. "There's no need to be frightened. Why, with one twist of my wrist, I could throw this bounder to the ground."

"Yeah?" George growled, and the girl felt his fingers close more tightly about the gun.

She managed a laugh that was half hysteria. "Don't be silly, Larry. Of course I mean it. I'm going to marry George. We've been engaged—ever so long." George's fingers relaxed slightly, and she breathed more easier.

"Now will you get gone, or will I have to throw you into the ravine?" he snarled.

Once more Larry ignored him. His eyes were on Kitty's smiling face. He was convinced at last. "You little cheat! You flirt! You—you Jezebel!" he cried, turned on his heel and strode away.

George took Kitty's arm with a pompous gesture. "We'll go and break the news to mom. Of course I knew you loved me all the time—you were just trying to make me jealous, eh, you little cat, you! It's a darned good thing for that city chap that you found it out when you did!"

There was nothing to do but to keep up the pretense. The girl's heart was thumping so rapidly, she could hardly hear. But at least she had saved Larry, even though she had sent him out of her life forever. He would never know why she had acted as she had. She would never have a chance to explain. The thought was like claws at her heart. She had saved him, but at what a cost to herself!

George lost no time in telling his mother that Kitty had agreed to marry him, and the sooner the better, he finished emphatically. Mrs. Kelly bestowed on the girl a smile she fondly believed a winning one, but her voice rasped as usual.

"I thought you'd realize before long that you loved George. He's so handsome, so splendid, a girl couldn't help loving him."

"Yes, yes, go on," George grinned fatuously.

For the life of her, Kitty could not respond.

Mrs. Kelly smiled more broadly. "You're a little timid, aren't you? Well, that only makes George love you more. To-morrow morning will be a good time to get married. We'll go in town, get the license, have the marriage done with, and then—after that—well, I've got some news for you, Kitty. I think you've got some relatives after all. At least there are some lawyers who'd be glad to find you."

Kitty looked up, startled. What did the woman mean? But she refused to explain any further, and the girl didn't give it much more thought. She was too much occupied with another, more serious problem. She had done what

she did to save Larry's life, but no power on earth could induce her to marry George Kelly. All day she racked her mind trying to evolve some plan of escape. There was no chance to get to The Corners, where she would find the only friend who might help her. No matter what she did, nor where she went, she felt George's eyes stealthily watching her. But there must be something she could do—she would not give up.

She was glad when it was night at last. If only George and his mother would sit in the kitchen together and drink, and leave her alone to think—

SHE came to a decision at last. She would wait until she was sure the pair were sleeping soundly; then she would slip downstairs and out of the house and make her way to The Corners. The woods would be terrifying in the dark, but nothing could be worse than the ordeal that awaited for her to-morrow. She was glad there was a moon, and Shep would be a protection. Dear Shep—he was all she had left.

She sat in her dark room, on the floor, her head pillowed on the window-sill.

Suddenly she heard a low voice, coming from the tree. "Kitty, Kitty, are you there?"

She jumped up, trembling in every nerve. Larry was creeping out over the limb. Now he jumped lightly to the porch. "Kitty, you didn't mean it, did you? Darling, don't break my heart." His voice was breathless with longing.

She leaped up and stood beside him, her eyes fixed adoringly on his. "Oh, Larry, you came back! I am so glad—so glad!"

His arm went quickly around her. "I had to come back," he said. "I had to know for sure."

He caught her to him, passionately. "Sweetheart, you're going away with me now—this very night. I won't leave you here again—I can't! Will you go with me? Will you marry me, Kitty, dearest?"

She lifted her face to his. "I will go with you—to the end of the world!"

Very cautiously, he helped her climb from the porch down the tree, and soon they were walking across the grass and over the little swinging bridge to the place where Larry's car was parked, while Shep followed closely behind. "It's only an hour's ride to Westglow. I'll take you to my sister—you'll love each other, I know. And then we'll make plans to be married. I want it to be soon, dear heart," he whispered tenderly, as he took the wheel. The dog settled himself in the rumble seat.

As they speeded along Kitty stole a glance at Larry's face, trying to realize the wonderful thing that had happened. But she could not forbear an anxious glance behind. If George had been awakened by the car—if he should miss her even now—

They were covering the miles so smoothly it was like flying. Soon they would be far enough away to be clear of any danger. She sank back more comfortably, and tried to calm the tiny fear that still persisted in her brain. And yet, even as she did so, she cast an uneasy glance over her shoulder again. They were pursued! Under the light of the moon she recognized the ramshackle Kelly Ford behind them, and a scream burst from her lips. "It's George! He's after us! Faster, dear—faster!"

But Larry stopped the car. "Sweetheart, don't be afraid. I'm going to settle this once and for all."

"Oh, but I'm a coward. I *am* afraid!" she sobbed. Nearer and nearer came the ramshackle Ford, roaring as if in fury. Larry stood straight and slender on the running board, waiting.

THE other car stopped, and George leaped from it, and charged with the snarl of an enraged animal. Larry parried his thrust with a careless laugh. Then the thing happened that Kitty had so feared; George whipped out a revolver from his belt. "Get out of the way, if you care to live! I'm going to get the girl—she's my promised wife!"

A moan of terror came from Kitty's lips. Was she to see her darling killed before her eyes, herself powerless to help him?

But Larry hadn't the slightest intention of being killed. With the agility of a mountain lion, he leaped at his assailant, just as Shep, with a low growl, ran in between the big brute's legs, tripping him. Both men toppled to the ground. There was a sharp report of the pistol as they went down, but the shot glanced off harmlessly.

George had been taken by surprise. He had not expected the slender Larry to show such strength. His fingers were even now closing about the big man's throat with a grip like iron. The two men grappled, rolling over and over, and at last the larger one was on the top and making a lunge for the pistol, which had been knocked aside. But Kitty had suddenly found her courage and seized it in her hand. "Throw it down!" George snarled, and wrenched it away with a cruel twist of her wrist. But this gave Larry the chance to catch him off his guard. Lying on his back as he was, he raised both feet and dealt the other a terrific blow in the abdomen. George staggered, lurched, slumped to the ground.

When Kitty dared open her eyes again, she and Larry were once more on their way. "Do you think he's dead? He's—a beast, but I don't want him to die."

Her lover laughed and kissed her. "No such luck, sweetheart. But I don't believe he'll ever trouble us again."

In half an hour the car turned into the long, glistening driveway of an imposing house set in the midst of a wide lawn. From the open windows there came the sound of music and laughter.

"Welcome home, dearest," Larry said gayly. "This is Uncle Damon's, where we live in the summer. They seem to be having a party."

Kitty was painfully aware of her gingham dress and worn slippers. "Edith will fix you up," he whispered softly.

They entered a long hall; in the great drawing-room beyond, a crowd of people were dancing, the girls dressed in filmy summer frocks of rainbow hues. For a moment she was panic-stricken. She had no idea Larry lived in such a wonderful place. She had never thought about his home. But she could not help feeling out of place here. Larry told her to wait until he found Edith, but soon returned to her with a tall woman, whose gray, penetrating eyes surveyed the girl superciliously. "Larry, who is this person, and where on earth have you been? Aren't you forgetting your duties to your guests—to Winifred, your fiancée?"

"One question at a time, please, Aunt Stella." Larry's face was flaming. "This is Kitty Dare. Kitty, I want you to know Mrs. Lansing, my aunt."

Kitty's heart had suddenly contracted with pain. What had this woman said? Larry's fiancée! Her face went pale. Then she felt his arm on hers. "Come upstairs with me, dear. We'll find Edith there."

He knocked at a door on the second floor, and they entered a sitting room. A blue-eyed girl so much like Larry that she might have been his twin, sprang up at sight of them.

"Edith, this is Kitty Dare," the young man said. "I want you to love her as I do."

For a moment Edith seemed to hesitate, then she put out her hand. "Can't say I blame Larry, for you're the sweetest thing I ever saw." She turned to her brother. "Better go and change—you're all over dust. I'll take care of Kitty. I suppose we're all in for it. We'll have to dress and go down—it's a bore, but there's no help for it."

Larry smiled at Kitty, said "Okay" and went out.

Kitty felt bewildered, but the other girl's breezy, friendly manner soon put her at her ease. Edith was burrowing in the closet among such a variety of frocks as Kitty had never dreamed of seeing. She brought out a pair of silver slippers, and a lovely silver lace and rose frock. "You'll look like an angel in this. Here, I'll help you get into it."

She obeyed, supposing this was what Larry expected of her, and when she surveyed herself in Edith's long cheval mirror, a little ecstatic sigh escaped her. Could she really look as nice as that? Her eyes shone like stars. Edith kissed her. "You're sweet and lovely. I'm tickled pink that you and Larry are in love—and that you're going to be my sister."

While she was slipping into a lovely frock of black chiffon, Mrs. Lancaster came in. "What is the meaning of this, Edith?" she demanded.

"I let her have a dress so she could go down to—your party," Edith explained.

"The gingham dress in which she arrived is more becoming to one of her station," remarked Mrs. Lancaster's stinging voice. "Further, I want you to understand that your encouragement of Larry in his infatuation for this girl does not please me. If he persists in it, I will cut him off without a penny. Besides, there is Winifred. How can he act so cavalierly toward her?"

"I suppose that that has been arranged," Edith said defensively. "Surely Larry would not engage himself to one girl while he was engaged to another."

"He's been carried away by this girl's baby-doll's prettiness. That's plain enough, but if he marries her, I repeat, he doesn't get *one cent* of my money!"

EDITH threw Kitty a smile that was meant to be reassuring, then left the room in obedience to a gesture of her aunt's. Then Mrs. Lancaster turned to Kitty. "Now I'll hear what you have to say," she said coldly.

"If Larry will lose his inheritance because of me—I—I just couldn't bear that. I—I think I'd better go. Maybe he does love this—this other girl." Her voice had a sob in it.

"I'm beginning to believe you're sensible at least. If you'll go away, I'll pay you well. You couldn't ever belong here. You ought to know that."

Kitty drew herself up proudly. "I don't want your money. But it is dark, and if—if you could send me away in a car—I could go at once, and not have to wait till morning."

"I'll have the car at the side entrance at once. And you will realize before long that you are doing the best thing."

"I am doing it for Larry," Kitty said, and her voice broke.

The door closed on the tall figure of Mrs. Lancaster, and it was the work of an instant to strip off the lovely dress and underthings and to get back into her own simple garments. In less than ten minutes she was ready to leave, and tiptoed softly down the stairs. She did not notice that her locket had become unfastened and that it slipped from her neck as she descended.

A few minutes later a tall, gray-haired man came up the stairs, noticed the piece of fragile jewelry, and picked it up. An exclamation burst from him. He stared at the locket and chain as one might stare at a ghost.

Just then Larry came out of his room, saw his uncle standing there, and took his arm. "Uncle Damon, I've got something to tell you. Aunt Stella is trying to be nasty, but I'm sure you'll be on my side. I'm going to marry the sweetest, dearest girl in the world, and I want your blessing."

The tall man smiled, his eyes still on the locket. "Isn't this rather sudden, my boy? But wait, tell me whose locket is this, and how did it get here?"

Larry took the locket, gave it one glance. "Why, that belongs to Kitty, the girl I'm telling you about. She's going to be my wife."

"Kitty who?" The question came quickly.

"Kitty Dare, Uncle Damon. I can't wait for you to meet her. She's with Edith. I'll go and bring her to you."

"Please do so at once." His uncle's voice held unrestrained eagerness. But Kitty was nowhere to be found. Larry found Edith, who was looking everywhere for the girl, and together they searched the house and even the gardens, but she had vanished into thin air. Meanwhile, the dancing went on as if nothing had happened. Larry returned to his uncle pale and worried.

"I can't find her. Nobody seems to have seen her, but I believe Aunt Stella is at the bottom of it all. Only she won't tell me."

To his surprise, his uncle smiled, and patted his arm. "Don't worry, Larry. I'll go to Stella, and get this matter straight. It happens that it means a lot to me as well as to you to find Kitty Dare."

Damon lost no time in drawing Stella a little aside from her guests, and learning the truth. After that, it was a small matter to learn from the chauffeur where he had driven the girl, and in a few minutes both Larry and his uncle were following her. It was while they were on the way that Larry heard his uncle's story for the first time, and why he had never married, something the kind old man had kept secret all the long years. He had loved the beautiful Katherine Nolan when they were both very young. But her people were people of wealth, while he was but a struggling country boy, and regardless of Katherine's love for him, they had been forcibly separated, and the girl had been persuaded to marry a man twelve years older than herself. He had never seen her again, but he knew that her husband had soon dissipated the Nolan fortune, and that Katherine had died in poverty, leaving an infant daughter. He had been searching for the child since he had heard of its existence, but had given up hope. And now he had, as by a miracle, come upon the locket, and had recognized it instantly as one he had given Katherine many years ago.

Now that, after years of struggle, he had amassed a considerable fortune, he wanted to adopt the daughter of the only woman he had ever loved, and restore her to the life that was her birthright.

"But if you're so set on marrying her, my boy," he finished teasingly, "it seems hardly worth while, so long as we're to have her in the family anyway."

The car stopped at last at the rude, unpainted building, and Larry knocked at the door and asked for Kitty. She came and stood silhouetted in the door against the dim light from inside. Larry took her at once in his arms. "Sweetheart, why did you run away? I've been frantic!"

She snuggled closer against his shoulder. "But, Larry, your—inheritance?"

He laughed. "No one ever pays any attention to Aunt Stella's threats. She's disinherited me at least a dozen times, but I have plenty of my own, darling, and can always make more."

She gave a happy sigh. "Oh, Larry, if I had lost you, I'd have died!"

"There's no danger of that ever happening, sweetest. You're mine, and no power on earth can take you from me."

He then told her Uncle Damon's story, and Kitty listened with tears softly glimmering in her lovely eyes. Then, with her lover's arm around her, she went out to the waiting car, where Larry's uncle kissed her reverently, and then held her at arm's length to gaze at her hungrily. "You're as sweet and lovely as I knew you would have to be, my dear little girl. Can you give me a tiny little corner of your heart, if Larry is willing to share it with me?" he asked, tears in his own eyes.

"I will give you a great big share," she told him happily. "There is always love enough to go around."

Her lover's eyes agreed.

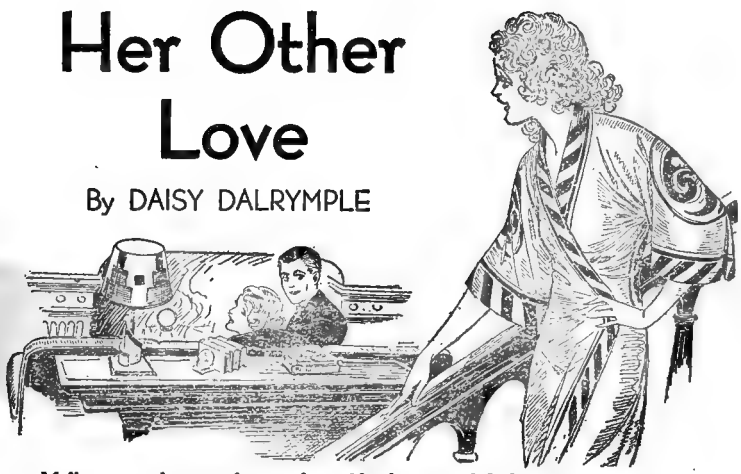
RAIN MEMORY

THE rain falls healing on my tired heart,
Gathering up the hours we've been apart
In soft, deceitful arms, and bidding me
Forget the pain. The wind croons ceaselessly,
Singing the little songs you used to love.
And I thank God for skies dull-gray above
That send down tender drops of lying rain
To tell me you are here with me again.

—*Dorothy Ann Blank*

Her Other Love

By DAISY DALRYMPLE



Molly, wrapped in a coolie coat, her golden hair cascaded about her shoulders, came slowly down the stairs. "What are you two doing here?" she asked

IT was on the first lap of the journey between New York and Los Angeles that it all commenced.

Leone, returning from her fourth year at an eastern college, was watching the young man across the aisle. She knew that he would presently explode unless he could think up some good excuse to speak to her.

Inside she rippled with little gusts of laughter, but her small sweet face was gravely bent above a book. "If only he'd pick up my five dollars! He won't even *look* at it—"

She gave the green note a little kick with no success. She dropped another bill. Still, no result. Leone gave it up. She sighed. She laid her book down. She stooped and collected the two bits of paper.

"Just to show he's a gentleman he might at least have jumped down and bumped heads with me," she thought. "I'm afraid he's not very bright."

But apparently he was better than she feared. Suddenly she felt him standing beside her; towering over her. He stooped. She had a quick impression of a nicely tanned neck, an excellent haircut. Then he was speaking to her with the most appealing suspicion of a smile.

"I think you dropped this."

Leone stared at the object in his hand. It was another five dollar bill.

"But I—I thought I picked them both up."

Gently from him: "You must have dropped three."

Now, Leone knew she had only two such bills in her purse. This third "V" was a perfect little stranger. But what could she do about it? Insist that the young man was the rightful owner and imply an artful strategy? Or keep it and let him think her just a mite dishonest? Unable to decide, she blushed wildly and chose the latter course, smiling a troubled thanks.

He was good-looking apart from the

anxious knots in his forehead. Hair auburn, with the hint of a natural marcel brushed severely straight; nose short and a little retroussé—on a girl it would have been called cute; eyes blue and wistful; lashes heavy, with brows several shades darker than his hair; mouth large, gay, and singularly winning; chin stubborn. Temperament, shy, with the shyness wearing thin—disappearing.

"Do let's be friends," he broke out. "And—and have lunch with me. It'll be three days before we reach California, and I've been longing to talk to you. Besides, don't we know each other? I feel as if we must have met."

Leone twinkled back at him. "At Mrs. Van Huyler's, wasn't it? Why, yes! I wore a red dress with a black hat, and you—"

"Oh, well, let's pretend we did," he pleaded. "My name's Donald Furtherance—Don to you, if you'll honor me."

"And mine's Leone Durant."

"French?"

"About four generations back."

"You look French—so small and—and dainty and—"

"Now, be careful!" she laughed.

"All right. Personalities ab-solutely barred. But don't think I'm blind or unobservant, or anything dumb like that, just because of my silence. For nothing ever escapes me."

Which she thought was pretty good, considering the length of time those two five dollar bills had lain at her feet.

Over luncheon in the dining car they became surprisingly friendly, even confidential. Leone, in a dark princesse frock with full cream ruffles at neck and wrists, sitting before Don like a lovely little figure in a Fragonard study, assumed a glowing, jewel-like quality in his eyes. And Don, unromantically eating asparagus across from her, likewise became a shining young person, extraordinarily handsome, who needed only armor to turn him into—well, Tristan, for instance.

"So now I'm going to settle down in my uncle's office in Baltimore, work hard at architecture, and drop my side line," he was saying. "That's all there is about me."

"Sure?" Leone smiled.

"Quite. Your turn now."

A SHADOW hid the dancing flames in her pretty brown eyes. But she brushed it away. Surprisingly frank, she told him the truth.

"Molly and I lost our family before we were old enough to know them very well. So for a while we lived in an orphan home."

If there was shock and pity in his heart, none of it showed in his eyes. "I'll say that was a break for the other orphans. And I bet all the visitors tried to adopt you!"

"Not they. We were the world's worst imps. Every directors' meeting they had us up on the carpet. We'd still be holding down our tin mugs and our disorderly reputations if—A—we hadn't grown up, and if—B—Norman Ray hadn't adopted us."

"Ah, that explains it! The ladies were afraid to introduce so much glam and beauty into their peaceful households, but the first old boy who came along hunting youth and charm—"

"Wrong as usual," from Leone. "Norman's not old—he's only thirty, now. And he wasn't hunting anything more than a quiet life. But long ago his father told him that our dad had put him in the way of making his fortune in the automobile business; so when Norman heard that Molly and I were orphaning in a home he felt it

was his duty to pull us right out and adopt us."

"Good for him—though it's rough on me that I didn't hear about you first."

Leone's dimples — small ones that nestled round her mouth—flashed at him. "You must have been in high school about that time."

"Possibly, but I'd have worked hard to support you fittingly. By the way, surely you don't mean that this Norman Ray is the owner of the Ray Motor Works?"

"That's the one. We call him Norry at home."

"Great Bullrush, he's a plutocrat! And so, I suppose, are you. Do you and your sister live in that cream stucco mansion with the white nymphs chasing across the front, and the private lake in the grounds?"

"At Santa Monica — on San Vicente? Why, yes. Have you been there?"

"Only as a sightseer."

"How funny! Norman's rich, but he's not at all high hat. He's a darling, or he wouldn't have adopted us. Really, he's been the most wonderful brother two girls ever had. We owe him—well, we owe him everything there is."

Said Don, frowning pathetically: "Of course I don't yet figure in high finance, but I'm getting there, ma'am, I'm getting there"—he made a large vague gesture—"and all my life I've craved some one who'd—er—appeal to me as a daughter, who'd bring me my orange juice in the morning, and hold my hand when I felt lonely in the evening—"

Altogether, they had a very good time over it.

"So," said Leone at last, "you thought you'd take a trip west before you settled down in Baltimore?"

Don looked a trifle self-conscious. "As a matter of fact, it's my side line that brings me west."

"Your side line?" She was unashamedly curious. "I think you mentioned that once before."

He confessed that he was a "tin jockey," one of those men who amuse themselves racing cars. He loved the game, but since he was the last of the Furtherances his uncle, a bachelor, had made him promise to give it up and return to architecture. He was now on his way to the try-out races at the new Kermi circuit for a final dissipation. Also, he hoped to win a last cup.

Leone was interested. "Norman's entering a car, too. He and Molly are nuts and raisins on motor racing. You must come over to see them. I'm sure you could have wonderful talks together."

"Yes." Don seemed pleased, but not quite satisfied. "I'm certainly coming—no escape, lady! But remember, you're not to pair me off with some one else. Such as I am, I'm all for you—"

Bright banners in Leone's cheeks. "I won't make a fuss," she promised.

Lamps in Don's eyes. "Consider yourself kissed," said he with considerable nerve.

AT Los Angeles, three days later, Norman and Molly met Leone and whisked her off to the lovely house of the white nymphs rising like a small castle on San Vicente.

"Oh, darling, we've missed you so frightfully, Norman and I!" from Molly, small, golden-haired, sports loving. "Why did you have to go to an eastern college? Promise never, never to leave us again!"

"If you do," Norman threatened,

"we'll hobble you and tie you to a ring."

"Ha, ha!" from Molly. "That sounds matrimonial, eh, what?"

"I mean a ring in the wall," Norman explained rather hastily.

He was tall and distinguished-looking, with a thin, sensitive face and dark hair touched with snow at the temples. Father, mother, and brother he had been to the two girls for nine years, having adopted them when he was at the amusing age of twenty-one. They adored him, and he teased and spoiled them both with seeming impartiality.

"I wonder if a girl ever before had such a nice guardian as Norman?" they often asked each other.

At luncheon that day Molly broached the subject that had been secretly occupying her frivolous young mind.

"Now tell us about all your men, Leone. Surely you've left shoals of them back east?"

"Naturally, if they haven't all shot themselves since I came west."

"You would say something trivial like that when I broach a serious subject! But what about the cute-looking boy you introduced to us at the station?"

"Oh, that!" with elaborate indifference. "You must mean Don Furtherance. He's a racer."

Molly gave a wild shriek. "Don—D-Don Furtherance! You can't mean *him!*"

"Yes, I do. What's wrong with him?"

"Why, he's a prince of the business! He's won more cups than any other man in America. He's a hero with a fan mail. And you say his name as if it were Dick Robinson!"

"He's—he's coming here to-night," said Leone, considerably startled.

"If that isn't my luck," groaned Molly. "I've promised to go out with Bob Coats, and he said he was coming early! I've just a good mind to put him off."

Leone's heart was sinking a little. Molly was so very pretty, so sweet and gay! She knew so much about motor racing! Wouldn't Don really prefer her? A premonition, gray and tenuous as a fog, settled about her, overpowered her.

"Anyway, you'll see him, Norman," said Molly, "and you'll give me a long and glowing description, won't you, old bean?"

"I'll describe him, infant, with not less than twenty adjectives—"

"Aren't you a pet!"

"If I see him," Norman added. "But it happens that I, too, am stepping out to-night."

"Not with a girl!" said Molly. "Don't tell me—"

"I have a date with a lady in blue-and-silver," Norman told her with dignity.

"Oh, you and Terry are going to try out the new racer!"

"All I'll tell you about it, infant, is that I'm certainly going to step on a fast date."

They laughed at him, and made him kiss them good-by—an issue he often dodged.

Molly left early with Bob Coats; and Leone was glad. For suddenly she knew that Don Furtherance was going to mean a great deal in her young life. And Molly had such a compelling charm!

But when Don came she forgot all about her sister. For he came with flames in his eyes and fire and honey on his tongue. He came armed to conquer.

For a while they wandered through

the garden where the shrine lay hushed in dreams, and the little fish slept in the fountain bed; where the roses nodded at the drowsing wisteria and honeysuckle, and the lemon blossoms breathed faint, spicy perfume. Just Leone and Don and the garden, with a faint sickle moon and a star or two for audience. And the man told the girl that he loved her.

"I suppose you'll think I'm mad, talking like this so soon after we've met. But I can't help it, Leone. You're the sweetest thing on earth. You're my 'sweeter than sweet'—I suppose I'm talking like an idiot."

"No, no—you're not," quickly from Leone. "But—you hardly know me!"

"Hardly know you? I know you better than any one in the world, dear. When I first saw you I spent hours trying to get you to look at me. Why, I even—"

"I know!" She laughed breathlessly. 'You gave me an extra five dollars."

He grinned. "So you got me, did you?"

"Yes. Better than you got me. I suppose—it never occurred to you that I—dropped those other bills so that a polite young man could pick them up for me?"

"Darling, you didn't!" he cried in disbelief.

"But I did!"

Leone's voice dropped into silence.

There was no holding him now. Don caught her hands and kissed them deliriously. He drew her to him and buried his face in her soft sweet throat. He kissed her eyes, and last of all her warm red lips. A kiss she wished might last forever; a kiss that dropped through to her heart and burst into a thousand songs. A kiss that was gay and glad and solemn—all at once.

"Darling, you love me, too! Don't dare to deny it—you do love me!" Another song of incredible moments—sweeter than the lemon blossoms, tenderer than the young moonlight.

"Don, you must stop! I haven't said—anything yet."

"Silly—blessed and foolish! You've said all you need ever say to make me a king. When will you marry me, Leone?"

Husky-voiced, wistful-eyed, he asked this question, at once so beautiful and so prosaic; and of course Leone, who had only held off for the thrill of hearing him plead, gave in.

SOME time elapsed before they admitted that, though romantic, California nights are cold, no matter what time of year. Later, they were glad enough to take shelter inside, to touch a match to the logs in the living-room fireplace, and cuddle down on the davenport in front of it.

"Darling, are we mad to fall in love in such a hurry?"

"Beautiful, that's the way it should always be done."

"Don, I'm so worried about the race! I couldn't bear to have you hurt. Terry — Norry's driver — says it's frightfully dangerous."

"The fellow's merely boasting. Precious little foolish, nothing could keep me from winning. Not now."

"But you're giving it up, aren't you? You won't come back for the big fall races?"

"Not unless you refuse to go to Baltimore before that date."

Then Molly came home and surprised them, and was even more surprised herself when she heard the news.

"You oyster, Leone, you hard-shelled little oyster! Acting so blah and indifferent when I asked about your racer! Just think, I'll be Don

Furtherance's sister-in-law! Isn't it wonderful? Oh, I can hardly believe it!"

And Leone's heart was full of joy, swept clear of the small terror of Molly's extraordinary prettiness; for now she saw Don's eyes on her sister, full of brotherly approval and nothing more. He was hers — Leone's — all hers. She blushed a little for those unworthy suspicions.

When he had gone she told Molly she would wait up for Norman.

"I'd like to be the first to tell him. Don's coming to see him to-morrow. But you know how near Norry is to us; I think he'd like to hear it from me first."

Molly agreed and left her; so for a while Leone sat gazing into the freshly stirred fire, weaving pictures into the blue and yellow and crimson flames— dreams of a life that seemed almost too perfect to come true—

This was how Norman found her.

"What! You still up, Leone?"

"Yes, Norry. I stayed because I have some news for you. Sit down here, beside me."

"What? That tight squeeze!"

"Try it!" Laughing up at him, holding out a flower-smooth hand to pat his big one.

How good-looking he was: kind, humorous eyes, sternly controlled mouth. One never knew quite what Norman was thinking. It suddenly came to Leone how much she loved him, her brother-daddy, how much he meant to both Molly and her. Everything they had in the world they owed to him. But for him they might be out washing some one's dishes for a living.

She leaned close and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Norry, you're a dear!"

He was pleased. A small wave of color crept up his thin face.

"What is it now—a new car perhaps?"

"Horrid thing, that was honest-to-gosh sentiment! Norry, I have something to tell you!" She caught the lapels of his coat, dropping her eyes to the third button of his waistcoat. "Something perfectly marvelous—to me, at least."

His hands moved slowly up and over hers. "What—are you going to tell me, Leone?"

"I—I've fallen in love, Norry."

"You—you mean—?"

"Yes, dear. In a way it takes courage to tell you, because you're such a funny, stiff, reserved old peach. No one ever knows quite what goes on in that think box. I suppose I've studied you more than any one in the world, and even I don't know the inner works. Perhaps you'll disapprove, but I hope not. You do want me to be happy— you do like me, don't you, Norry?"

"Like you?" His hands on hers were trembling now. "Leone, you— funny, appealing child, are you trying to tell me that you—love me?"

She was surprised at his tone, at the note in his voice.

"Why, yes, dear, of course I love you. And that's why—"

But she got no further, for Norry caught her close, close, and dropped his head into the scented hollow just beside her shoulder.

There was silence. Leone's eyes, startled, horror-filled, stared out across Norman's head to a red ember in the fireplace cooling to ashes.

At last the man looked up, took her face between his hands.

"Darling," he whispered, eyes misted, wondering, "darling, precious Leone, is it true, is it really true?"

No answer.

"You've always meant everything in my life, Leone, since the moment I first saw you, a lovely, tragic child with a stormy, a terrible beauty, raging behind those deep dark eyes. I didn't realize it then, because you were too young. But I've known for years, Leone—I've known, and I've been waiting, waiting and dreaming and wondering. And sometimes it's been rather terrible because I thought perhaps I was too old. I was afraid I could never rouse in you the—the tiger you've stirred in me. Oh, my dear—my dear!"

Again he buried his head while Leone tried to think, to plan words that would make her life right again. But she couldn't. She was too stunned. No words would come. This, then, was what the premonition had meant!

Her lips were cold as ice when Norman kissed them! Her hands were limp as frozen flowers, frozen flowers on a new grave.

Molly threw off her mask of impishness. "If you stop me it will have to be by force!" she cried

Later, of course, there had to be words. One couldn't keep quiet forever. Norman was talking, asking her questions, insisting—

"You're sure, quite sure that you love me—that way, Leone?"

And then her voice, flat and toneless: "It—means a lot to you, Norry?"

"More than anything else has ever

meant, dear. It means what seeds and rain and sunshine mean to a garden. I've never married. I never could marry since you filled every crack and cranny of my life. It half killed me when you wanted to go east to college, but I wouldn't try to turn you from it. Your happiness has always come first. Sometimes I've been afraid you'd never waken, for you seemed like a lovely, sleeping child. And at other times I've been afraid some stranger would rouse you—"

"You would have minded? That would have been terrible?" A trembling hopeless question. "What would it have done to you, Norry?"

"Well, they say a man can stand anything short of an ax on his neck."

Leone shivered. An ax on her neck—a shroud on her heart—ice on her lips. And still, because he knew nothing of the fire another man had kindled, Norman noticed nothing wrong.

There, on the very seat where she and Don had made their mad glad plans she sat with her head on Norman's shoulder, Norman's arms around her, Norman's love like a rising tide, drowning her. Wonderful brother Norman, whose tenderness and generosity had been the great outstanding features of her life—

"WHAT in the world are you two doing down here?"

It was Molly, big-eyed and laughing, her golden hair in a cascaded halo about her shoulders, a bright coolie coat wrapped around her pyjamas. She came tripping down the stairs while Norman got to his feet.

"Mercy, you look as though you'd been seeing visions," she told him. "Are you pleased about Leone?"

"Molly"—he looked very straight and boyish—"I'm the happiest man in California, or probably in the world. And your sister has made me so proud that—"

"Good gosh," said Molly, slangily, "a guy would think you were the groom-to-be!"

"And I am, infant. I'm Leone's groom-to-be, and your future brother-in-law."

Leone was terrified at what thoughtless little Molly might let escape. A warning struck from the elder sister across to the younger. Molly got the full message and crumpled like a doll.

"You don't mean—you're going to marry—*Leone?*"

"I mean just that. You see, she loves me. Come and kiss me, infant. As a celebration I'll give you a new roadster."

But Molly didn't kiss him. Suddenly she flared into a little skyrocket, stiffening up on small childish feet.

"Kiss you, you poor idiot? I'll do nothing of the sort! And Leone's a worse idiot than you. I wish you both all the joy an unhappy marriage can give to folks who'd be better employed in a nut factory. So there!"

She tore up the stairs. Childish feet pitter-patter, pitter-patter. Norman stared at Leone, one brow lifted—half ironical, half angry.

"What's happened to the infant?"

Leone shrugged. "Don't notice her. She's just surprised."

But there was a straight worried line between his brows. "Does she think I'm too old for you, dear?"

"Don't be crazy, Norry. You're only thirty."

"Still, you're only twenty-one."

"What's nine years?"

She actually had to comfort him, to reassure him—

Later, by the window up in her room, she sat dry-eyed, her whole life before

her in smashed bits of gold and scarlet and royal blue. It would be a drab undertone now, built up of duty and service. Poor little Molly, so loyal and honest! But she mustn't be allowed to hurt Norman, that prince of men.

Don! Oh, she mustn't think of Don, so handsome, so dear, so young, who had come into her life like a blaze of fire, a meteor.

She thought of his eyes, of the tenderness about his mouth, of the fun they had had over the five dollar bill. She tried to plan a letter, explaining. And this was what finally broke her down, the tears blinding, choking, destroying her.

In the end it was Molly who told Don what had happened, a Molly acting much against her will.

"Try to make him understand," Leone wept. "Tell him what—Norry means to us. Just how it happened. That it would kill him if he knew—"

"Would it?" from hard little Molly's twisted lips. "They say you learn to die gracefully."

"Oh, don't talk that way, dear. You make it too hard for me. Don't you see I've got to make Norman happy?"

"Not saying what you've got to do to other people," from Molly.

"He—he'll probably fall in love with you—Don, I mean," said Leone. "Once I thought I couldn't bear it, but now—it would be the best thing that could happen. You're—both crazy about motor racing and everything. You have — the same tastes all through."

"That thought was made in heaven!" Molly's voice was stiff with scorn.

And when she came back from her interview with Don, very little could be got out of her.

"What did he say? Oh, tell me what he said, Molly." Leone, distracted, lids swollen with weeping, cheeks pale as magnolias.

"At first he said I was lying—it just wasn't possible you'd treat him that way—"

"But you made him understand! Surely you told him—"

"Yes, I gave him a line to draw tears from a china bull. But what's the use of going into all that? I told him, and it's all over. He won't clutter up your doorstep any more. Now for Pete's sake put on some make-up, or you won't even brighten Norry's young life."

But Norman, in the way of men, noticed nothing wrong. Eyes shining, heart high, he stepped about the place like a king, pouring gifts and love at Leone's sacrificial feet.

"Why can't I love him?" she thought. "He's a dear. If I'd never met Don—if I'd learned in time that Norry cared, I wonder if things would have been different?"

"Aren't you coming with me to the races, dear?" he asked out of the troubled sky. "I have a box. This try-out is only two hundred miles—two hours or a little over—and I'm sure it won't tire you."

But she shriveled with horror at the idea. Go to the races? See Don Furtherance again? Never.

YET after they had gone, Molly inscrutable-eyed, Norman worried because his Leone wasn't feeling up to the mark, she couldn't resist turning on the radio to the station that was broadcasting the race returns.

She knew when the cars were off, in the order of handicap—seven of them, scarlet, gray, blue-and-silver, mauve, yellow, maroon and green.

Terry drove Norry's blue-and-silver; Don drove the maroon. She heard the announcer give a résumé of Don's record, his list of cups. She knew the order of the cars on their return after the first lap round the twenty-five mile circuit, Don one up. She listened breathless with anxiety when she heard that one of the machines had caught fire. Which one! Which one? Surely not the maroon. No, the announcer said it was the gray car. Sigh of relief.

For two hours she listened, eyes like wistful frightened flowers in the pale little face, till at last, toward the end, mad excitement possessed her. Number six, the maroon car, was leading. Just once more round the circuit!

"Win, Don — win, darling — beat Terry if you can! What do I care if he's Norry's driver. I'm all for you, Don!"

Then something happened. There was a change in the voice broadcasting, a quick, tense note.

"Aw, heck, boys, that's too bad—wait a bit, I don't quite get this . . . Look here, they've just telephoned in that there's been an accident a mile down the course—Number six—that's Don's car, the leader! It struck a flaw in the track—spun round like a pinwheel and charged into a wall. Driver hurt, they say. Poor Don! And I guess that gives the race to number three, the blue-and-silver—"

Leone screamed aloud; then crushed the back of her hand to her mouth. She mustn't let the servants, Chinese boys, hear her. Wild-eyed, she stared at the radio as though it had a living heart.

"Tell me—oh, tell me what's happened! Don't leave it like that! Don, Don—"

Five minutes—ten minutes—fifteen minutes. An eternity it seemed to Leone, waiting with hands clasped, fingers digging into tortured flesh. Then a cheer—the announcement that Terry was in first—number seven second—number five third. Mr. Norman Ray's car was the winner.

"Tell me—tell me!" was Leone's frantic plea; and it almost seemed as if the radio heard.

"We've just got further word," said the announcer, "that Don Furtherance has been taken to St. Hilda's Hospital outside Kermi. His condition is reported serious. Gosh, that's tough—we all like Don. You bet. So long, folks."

Leone hardly knew what she did; yet her swift actions were well timed.

Suddenly she was racing out to the garage, hatless, coatless—not that that mattered—hair crazily disordered. She backed out one of the roadsters and headed south from Santa Monica to Los Angeles—on toward Kermi. She inquired here and there, and finally shot into the circular drive of St. Hilda's Hospital.

At the desk when she asked for Don, voice thin and shaky, the clerk asked her if she was a relative. It was on the tip of her tongue to say no, when something warned her not to.

"Aren't you expecting me? Didn't you get my message? I must see him at once—it's frightfully important."

The clerk looked sympathetic. "Here's Miss Jones, the head nurse on his floor. I'll ask her about it." A second later: "This is a relative of Mr. Furtherance, Miss Jones — the motor accident. She's his sister and she wants to see him at once." Well-meant little fib.

Miss Jones considered. "He's just had stitches in his scalp, Miss Furtherance—"

"Oh, tell me"—a dry sob—"is he very bad?"

"I'm afraid so." This gravely. "He has internal injuries. They gave him only a local anæsthetic, so perhaps he could see you just a minute."

She led Leone to a small room, white and clean and dark, and whispered: "Don't stay more than five minutes!"

Leone was alone with Don.

HE was lying as still as death, his head bound in white, a cage supporting the bedclothes over his legs. There was a strong smell of disinfectant in the room. His hand, clenched tight, lay on the sheet beside him. Leone dropped on her knees and pressed her cheek to that hand. Instantly he opened his eyes.

"Who's that?"

"Oh," sobbed Leone, "Don—Don, darling!"

"Not—Leone?"

"Yes, dear, it's Leone. I love you, Don. I'm breaking my heart over you—I can't bear you to be hurt!"

A quick gleam in those tired eyes, so black in his pale face. His voice weak but sure:

"Will you give up that — other fellow?"

The question was unexpected. Poor Leone lost her head.

"Don, darling, how can I? It would ruin his whole life! And you know what he's done for us. But I love *you*, Don. I can't bear this! You must get well, dear—"

He turned away. He wouldn't speak to her. A spasm of pain twisted his lips.

"Don, Don, don't look like that! I didn't mean it—I'll give Norry up—I'll marry you! I'll do anything, if you'll only get well! Darling, get well!"

But his eyes, such sick eyes, turned upon her resentfully. "Go away," he whispered. "Go away. You're just kidding me! *Please—go—away—*"

She would have said a million frantic things, but Miss Jones came in at that moment.

"I'm afraid you're exciting him. You must leave."

"But I want to tell him—"

"Not now, positively not now!"

And again Don moved his suffering lips. "Take her—away!" he said.

Stumbling, weeping, she was led back to the entrance hall, Miss Jones, in the manner of nurses, kind but firm. And there, sitting on a bench by the front door, was Molly.

"Leone," cried Molly, springing to her feet, "what are you doing here? Good heavens, what would Norry say! He's here, too, round that corner talking to a doctor—"

Leone could hear the voices—"fault in the road worn thin by the heavy racers—car spun round and crashed into stone fence—conscious, but they're afraid his back's broken—"

Molly stopped her sister's cry with a quick little hand.

"You've got to behave, see? You've just got to! Here, nurse, you tell the gentleman I met a friend and went on with him. And mind you tell him nothing more! No, that's all right. I can look after her."

She rushed Leone down the stairs, out to the little roadster, and back along those many miles to Santa Monica.

SIX weeks later Leone was convalescent—six weeks of terror and suffering beyond anything she had ever imagined. But at last the brain fever abated, and she emerged from the shadows, a pale ghost of the girl

who had come west with Don Furtherance.

She asked about him almost at once, and learned that his uncle had taken him home to Baltimore. There were all sorts of reports: some of them said Don's back was injured and he would never walk again; others said that his spirit had gone, too—he had no comeback. Thinking of this, and of his last dismissal of her. Leone would weep helplessly for hours.

"What's the matter, darling?" Norry fussed. "Are you — unhappy about something? That's the third time I've caught you crying."

"Just nerves, Norry. I'll be all right when I'm stronger."

So Norry sent her north to Carmel for two months, and then she visited an old friend in Sacramento. It was just a month before the date set for her wedding when she returned, and she found herself rushed into preparations—shopping, lingerie, fittings, invitations. Quite by accident she discovered the trouble Norry was having with Molly, naughty young Molly who seemed to have "gone jazz." Riding, as Norman said, hell-for-leather for a fall.

"I don't like all this cocktail business. I don't like these road house parties and the joy rides. They're unwholesome. I thought you said jazz stuff was out of date, yet here you are coming home with the milkman—"

"Norry, how did you guess? You must have grown very noticing to see what a perfectly adorable milkman we have!"

"Oh, cut it, Molly. You know perfectly well what I mean. You come in at five and six every morning, and —and Leone and I are upset about it. Why, you've changed completely."

"But not in the heart, dear guardian. If you could take my pulse you'd find it beating the same dear old home-sweet-home tunes."

He looked really angry for Norman. "What's the idea, anyway? You used to go round with a decent crowd, but—"

"Norry," Molly interrupted sweetly, "you'd love them if you knew them better. And by the way, guardian, are you going to let me drive the blue-and-silver in the November races? They say Terry's lost his nerve since the accident at the try-out, but I haven't."

"For the love of lunacy, Molly, I think you must be losing your mind!"

"But Dick Proulx thinks you should let me."

"Confound Dick Proulx! What business is it of his?"

Their dialogues, which had at one time been on a jolly eye-to-eye basis, grew more and more in this present character.

"Why do you rag Norry so?" Leone asked her little sister.

"Because I think he's a fussy old goat," said Molly rudely.

"And I think you're horrid to talk that way about him."

"I'm sorry," said Molly, a trifle subdued. "But I can't help wanting to—to live and do things."

This was two weeks before the wedding, when the sun shone from day to day without a cloud in the sky above Santa Monica. The banana plants were high now in Norman's patio; the lemons were small and hard and green. There were roses and autumn wisteria in a riot of bloom; climbing pink geraniums in the dwarf oak tree; and poinsettias crimson against the stucco.

Every day Leone put fresh flowers before the garden shrine and whispered a secret prayer for a man's broken body, and her own broken heart.

Then the day of the big race drew near, and Norman and Molly, in moments of truce, talked occasionally of new domestic and foreign cars arriving with their owners, of new makes of carburetor, magneto, gadget, and such things as were Greek to Leone, but common salt to motor-race fans. There was an article in one of the papers recalling the cups won by famous "tin" jockeys, especially Don Furtherance.

Presently the very day dawned, and Molly suddenly chose to move right into the center of the stage. It was just an hour and a half before the race commenced when some one telephoned the news to Norman. He came flying out of his study to Leone like a madman, already nervous as a hare from working half the night at the garage with Terry and his mechanic, checking adjustments on the blue-and-silver.

"Terry's missing!" he shouted. "I think Molly bribed him. Young Hunter says she's entered her name as my driver!"

"But—but, Norry—Molly wouldn't do such a thing!"

"No? I'd just like to ask where you get your optimism."

"Oh," wailed Leone, "and if you hadn't waited to drive me out you'd have been at the track! You could have stopped her!"

"I can still stop her," said Norry, his face set like a chopping machine.

MOST of the way they drove on one wheel, but by a mercy they escaped the traffic cops. Near Kermi a tire exploded, and they transferred to a taxi which, having to detour all side roads leading to the race track, crawled like an insect.

At last they reached the garages, packed with long, snaky, sharp-nosed racing models of all shades from sober gray to pumpkin and splashed crimson. Their drivers, some still balancing and overhauling adjustments, looked like young knights in armor with an upper touch of the deep sea diver, super modern jockeys in leather helmets tight about their chins and goggles big as portholes. Shouting at one another; stowing away thermoses, chocolate bars, and sandwiches in oiled paper; making last minute bets.

From the grandstand outside came the hum of excited talk varied at times to a roar. Boys hawking their wares; bookmakers taking money, offering odds; men crying the praises of this make of car, that make. Leone caught a glimpse of the boxes: spectators arriving, finding their seats, the women gay as summer, a terraced flower garden in motion. Here was a new and mammoth race track wearing the old garment of romance. But Leone had no time for it. Beside Norman, a Norman white-faced and grim, she hurried through the garages.

"Where's my car?" he demanded.

It had been moved. Molly, as a precaution against this very thing, had taken it to a farther shed. Time was nipping when they found her—golden hair imprisoned by her leather cap; goggles saucily turned up from saucier eyes; pretty young lips fixed in a hard, determined grin.

"What do you mean by this?" Norman faced her furiously.

"Oh, gosh, so you've found out!" from Molly. "What a bust!"

Said Norman, eyes flashing: "From this minute you'll cut the big effects, Molly. Did you bribe Terry to get out?"

"How guessing of you!" she answered audaciously. "Maybe I did. Maybe he was scared. Maybe I told him you said I could take his place."

"Then get this, my dear—and I mean it—I'm running no car this race. So you can just take off your goggles and go home."

"And play with my dolls?"

"If you want to."

But Molly threw off her mask of impishness. Her next words were like bullets.

"If you stop me, you'll have to do it by force! You adopted me—you've done a lot for me. But what have I done in return? Just about everything. See? Others may have liked you from straight gratitude, but I've lived for you and fought for you and thought for you and worked for you from the minute I first saw you, not because of any darned gratitude, but because I wanted to. And now I'm going to take one last present from you—your racing car. And don't you dare to stop me!"

Other machines were pulling out, sirens wailing, horns honking. Molly sprang to the seat of the gently throbbing blue-and-silver and followed after them. Behind her Norman and Leone stared at each other dazed, bemused. Leone recovered first. She seized his arm.

"Stop her, Norry—stop her! She means to win the race and kill herself—she chose this way to make it seem natural. We'd never have known if we hadn't come. Molly—darling little Molly—save her, Norry!"

"But why should she be so mad?"

"Oh, don't you see, you poor fool—and I'm another! She loves you, Norry. Molly loves you. I never did. But she does—she loves you better than her life, and she can't live and see you marry me."

Norman's face fell into stricken lines. It went gray.

"Not—Molly—"

"Norman, stop her!"

Together they rushed after the cars. Two men in uniform stopped them. "Get back! The race has begun."

"I tell you I'm Norman Ray, and that's my ward! I won't let her—"

"Sorry, sir, I can't help who you are. They've taken their handicaps. Can't you hear the guns? There goes the last!"

THE cars were off—bullets of pumpkin and flame, blue-and-silver, black, splashed crimson, ivory, gray, rose and Nile green—nine of them by number. Norman and Leone clutched each other, desperate-eyed.

"Leone, did she ever tell you she loved me?"

"No, but she told *you* just now—"

And then Norry forgot her, straining to catch a last glimpse of number three, the blue-and-silver, flashing like a streak of moonlight out on the course. Silently he took Leone to their box on the grandstand, and the long wait commenced. Friends spoke to them, girls and men they had known for years, some who had been invited to the wedding.

"Is it true Molly's driving your car, Norman? Isn't it too thrilling? The only girl in the lot. How proud you must be!"

If only they'd stop! thought Leone. Couldn't they see Norman wasn't himself? Such a smiling sun striking over there on the great breast of the sea—beyond the bluff that rose from the track! All those things in the air—silly little toy balloons shaped like motor cars. Oh, the awful minutes—

Fifteen of them passed and the first racer appeared on the return lap. Same order as when they left, number three in her old place. A burst of cheers.

Marking of time cards. Stop watches. Dear Heaven, five hours and more of this! Five hundred miles!

Norman suddenly turned to Leone. "She wouldn't do that — she wouldn't—"

"Norry, you don't know her."

Again those lines. That gray pallor on his thin, kind face.

An hour passed. Molly won a place up. Two hours. One car had dropped out—another overturned. Driver not badly hurt. The eyes of the crowd were all on the blue-and-silver, the girl driver. She was game; she was sticking.

"There's something wrong with the engine," Norman burst out. "Terry would know what to do. Molly's no mechanic."

But still Molly hung on.

Four hours, punctuated every quarter by that gay sprinkling of bullets—pumpkin and flame, blue-and-silver, yellow, ivory, and Nile-green. Molly third from the leader now.

The crowds had lunch at the stands or went out to restaurants. Boys shouted sandwiches, lemonade, ice cream, and peanuts.

Two more cars dropped out.

"It's between the girl and the ivory now. The others haven't a chance."

Interest, flagging from the long hours, revived. A cool breeze swept in from the sea beyond the bluff. Molly was leading on the third lap of the last hour.

"The girl gets it—hooray! She beats the ivory!"

But no. The tension was awful during the last quarter hour. At the first return some one with a telescope shouted: "The ivory has it — he's passed her!"

"Oh, poor Molly!"

Norman flared up. "Why, even if she's second she's the star woman racer!" he cried. "She's the runner-up, and with her engine all crocked, too!"

Smoothly the winner flashed past the judge's stand. Then, ten seconds later, the blue-and-silver. Molly. The cheers were nearly all for her. Norman was on his feet, wild with pride, shouting his head off.

The cars flew by, the ivory slowing down. But the blue-and-silver kept straight ahead, crashed through the fence—and on—

"What's the matter? Can't she stop?" Whispers that grew to roars.

Leone clutched Norman's arm. "Can't she stop, Norry? Can't she stop?"

There was the bluff above the track; the open sea smiling and heaving beyond; Molly headed straight for it; the car snorting, laboring—

"She can't stop!" the people were exclaiming, horror-stricken. "The course is full of people now—she can't drive into them. Good God!"

Yes, she was making straight for the cliff and the open sea. To the crowds it seemed she was doing it to save others from accidents. But Leone and Norman knew what it really meant. They could see wild little Molly driving straight into the sunlight, her eyes bright with that shining death.

"The winner—see! The ivory car!"

Yes, even at that late moment there was a chance. The blue-and-silver was wounded. It had no speed on that broken up-grade. The winner had taken after it.

Foot on foot, yard on yard, the ivory gained. A daring chase that.

"Norman, what's he doing? Will he get her?" Leone's voice was agonized.

But Norman had disappeared. She

was alone. She saw the winner creep upon Molly, crowd her, almost lock with her, and suddenly veer away. She saw the blue-and-silver crash over the cliff—into the sea.

BUT Molly had been snatched into the ivory car. Leone was sobbing. A lot of people in the crowd were sobbing. The band started up. The tension broke but not the excitement.

"Some driver to attempt that! Who is he?"

Vaguely Leone heard the question. She was fighting her way down to Molly, coming back now. Some one said: "His name isn't listed, the owner is an Easterner. A last minute entrant."

Two men friends of Norman's recognized Leone and helped her get through the mob to the track. The ivory car had got in. There was Norman snatching Molly—a white-faced, dazed Molly—from her rescuer, kissing her. Shaking her. And there in the driver's seat, his leather hood thrown back, his goggles pushed up, sat—

"It's Don Furtherance!" a voice shouted.

A hundred voices took up the cry. The unknown driver, the winner of the five hundred mile Kermi, the daring rescuer of Molly Durant! Don Furtherance.

Leone suddenly went weak. Her knees crumpled like tulip stems. Norman, fighting his way through the crowds with Molly in his arms, saw nothing, knew nothing. Leone just crumpled, disappeared.

Floating off somewhere midway between the clouds and the ivory car she heard Don's voice: "Here — make way! I'll take the lady—"

And he took her. Like a prize. Or a precious jewel. Picking her up as though he hadn't been racing the better part of a day, picking her up and tucking her in the long winner, in the little space next the driver.

Wild hum of male voices—like raging bumblebees. "Let some one else take her, Don. They need you here—you can't go off like this — the judges—"

But the engine purred; the car leaped away from them. People cleared the track because they had to. Don turned and sped back for the twenty-first time down the racing circuit, empty now. And presently he parked under a eucalyptus tree and gave Leone a drink of coffee from his thermos.

"Feeling better?"

"Don," she gasped, "you shouldn't have left them—"

"Leone—"

"Yes, Don?"

"I love you."

"Not as much as I love you."

"What a whopper!"

"Darling, I thought you were—"

"Crippled, eh? No, dear. The papers love headlines, and I didn't care. But I heard you'd been sick, and I had to come back and get you away from that fellow, no matter what you said. So I got well."

"Oh, Don, you came to the races because of me? But didn't they recognize you at the sheds?"

"Sure they did. Molly did. But that wasn't long before the race. Will you come back to Baltimore with me, dear?"

"But, Don, I haven't said a word about Molly — I haven't thanked you—"

"That's all right—and she's all right—now. I talked to her before the race, Leone. She said I'd come too late. Is it true?"

"No, she's wrong, dear. You came just in time. I think Molly and Norman love each other. Only Norman didn't know it till to-day—"

She couldn't talk any more, for Don was kissing her all over the white heart of her face, kissing the small curved mouth.

"Leone—sweet—" There was a little catch in his voice. In a girl it would have been a sob. It made her heart turn over.

"And Don, you won't race any more cars?"

"Not if you'll marry me, dear."

"Oh, I'll marry you all right. You don't know"—a small hysterical laugh—"how crazy I am about you, Don!"

ILLUSIVE CONTENT

TO the bee that missed one flower,
How lovely that flower seems!
To the knight who has lost one tower,
No glory that loss redeems;
For the grapes that the fox called sour
Are the grapes that he eats in his dreams.

To the heart that has lost one pleasure,
All others are flat and stale;
To the miser who's lost one treasure,
The gold of the Rhine turns pale;
The grain that runs from the measure
Is the grain we must have, else we fail.

The glance that you cast at a stranger,
That glance I shall always miss,
And seek for a hidden danger
In the lingering of your kiss!
For love is "a dog in the manger,"
Who is never content with his bliss!

—Josefa Picard

The woman who hated them both was up there, giving evidence that would convict him

A Legacy of Hate

By BETTY TREVOR

LOVELY, sophisticated Serena Manning was crippled for life in an automobile accident. For more than two years she lay in her darkened room, refusing even to be carried out into the sunshine. Always passionately devoted to her husband, she now became jealous and exacting, demanding his constant attendance at her bedside, requiring him to give up his friends and business for her sake, begrudging him even an hour on his horse or with his little son. The child has a music teacher, Alison Graham, the doctor's lovely young daughter, and before Dale and she knew it themselves Serena knows that they care for each other. Serena has a maid, Anna Sanderson, who spies upon the young husband and the girl. One night they tell their love for each other, and sadly decide that Alison must go away; the next morning Serena is dead of heart disease Dr. Graham states.

Dale goes away, intending to travel for a year, but his intolerable longing for his home, Alison and the child, draws him back in six months, and, with her father's full consent, he marries the girl. While they are honeymooning important people in the town begin to get letters written by the dead woman, stating that her husband loved some one else, and that he was planning her death. Suspicion is aroused; her body is exhumed, and it is dis-

covered that she was indeed poisoned. Dale is arrested for murder.

CHAPTER VII

ALISON

WHEN Jumbo came in, so innocently happy and excited over the thrilling game he and daddy were playing, and gave Alison her husband's message, he little knew the agony that swept her. Mechanically she moved to the wardrobe and brought out an old hat.

"Get a pipe from the rack, Jumbo; not daddy's special ones," she said.

Jumbo must escape the blackness of this misery. As far as possible, his little world must be unclouded.

For a moment after the boy had gone she stood staring out into space, and into her young, immature face there came a look of determination.

"I'll not give in!" she cried. "I'm going to fight for him! It's all a lie, and there must be some way to prove his innocence!"

She went to the telephone and rang up Judge Small. Her voice was quiet and controlled, so that he could not help admiring her.

"I want to engage the very best counsel for my husband. No doubt you suspected he'd be arrested on this wicked charge. He's innocent, but I've got to work to prove it. Will you help me?"

"I'll come round and see you, my dear," said the judge sympathetically.

Half an hour later he was at the house, closeted with Alison.

"First and foremost," said the young wife gravely, "do you believe Dale did it? I want the truth."

"At first," said the old man, "I thought it was the ravings of a mad woman, but bit by bit the evidence has mounted up. Let me ask you a question, and be honest with me, whatever you are at the trial."

Her hand went up to her heart, as though he had struck her a blow. The trial!

"Were you and Dale Manning in love with each other before Serena died?"

She quivered, but answered resolutely:

"Yes!"

"Was there any love making between you?"

"One kiss on the day before she died! I was going away. I hadn't known before that I loved him; and there was no sin in either of our hearts. We were sorry for Serena, pitied her."

"My dear, don't you see how difficult it is for me?" asked the judge, miserably. "You confess to being in love, admit that part of her letters was true. She died, and you married before the year was up."

"So it's as black as that!" said Alison, piteously. She stood trembling, the horror closing down on her. "So you think he murdered Serena?" she asked at length.

"I don't know," answered her old friend unhappily. "Men do strange things for love."

"Not for love," said Alison. "Love is something sweet, uplifting. Our love was never evil. It made us want to be better! It wasn't a crazy passion that swept us off our feet, so that we didn't know right from wrong—that's not love! Before my Maker I swear to you, Judge Small, that there was nothing evil in my love for Dale, nor in his for me! You must believe me!"

"I do, my dear!" he answered, much moved. "Now I'll give you the name

of a good lawyer and we'll do what we can to bring your husband through. There's one good thing, a wife does not have to give evidence, so that kiss needn't come out!"

She shivered at his words.

"If Dale is questioned he will speak the truth," she said.

Privately, the judge thought that Dale Manning would have more wisdom than to mention that kiss.

The door opened and Alison's father came in. His face was haggard and drawn.

"What's this I hear?" he began harshly. "That Dale has been arrested for the murder of his wife!"

"Yes, father!" said the girl. "Arsenic killed her and they think Dale did it!"

JUDGE SMALL did not linger to see that sad scene. He bade them good-by and strode out to his car.

But he wasted no time. He motored to New York and brought back with him Mr. Vivian Delmarsh, the rising young attorney. Together they went carefully over the evidence, including the letters the judge and the minister had received.

"I intended to destroy these, but thought it wiser not to," explained Judge Small. "Similar letters were received by other people in town."

At the finish Delmarsh looked grave and shook his head.

"It's a very black outlook for Manning," he said.

That was exactly what the judge thought.

Later on they got permission to see Dale, and at the end of the interview Delmarsh was even more serious.

"I must tell you, Mr. Manning," he said, "that things look very black against you. You acknowledge you were in love with Miss Graham before your wife's death. You had access to the doctor's surgery through her. You admit that she brought sleeping powders to you, which you gave to the maid. Don't you see that the jury will realize that it is an easy matter for a man to get hold of poison when he has access to a surgery?"

"Keep it from my wife," said Dale. "I can bear anything, but let her believe that there's hope."

They went out together, to find Alison waiting.

"I want you to come back with me to the house," she said feverishly. "I must know what you think."

"Well, first of all, we must get hold of the maid Anna."

A horrid sense of dread flooded Alison. Anna! Why, Anna had hated her! She recollected that last speech that Anna had made: "There's some that will hardly wait until she's cold in her coffin before they step into her shoes!" Anna was her enemy. She had suspected from the first that Dale and she cared for each other. She would be the most important witness against him!

"I want to know everything," she said suddenly. "Dale may think I'm just a weak woman, but I'm strong where he is concerned. It's better for me to know the truth."

And so they told her everything, and for the first time she realized just what a black business it was. Everything seemed to point at Dale, calling him murderer.

When she had seen the lawyer off she sat down, a hunted look on her face. What could she do? Surely there must be something! Vivian Delmarsh, clever man as he was, did not really believe in Dale's innocence himself. She could easily see that. Judge

Small, who had known him all his life, was doubtful. There must be something she could do!

And almost instantly an idea came. Feverishly she hunted through the telephone directory until she had found a firm of private detectives. Then she called them up. She replaced the receiver with a sigh of relief as she realized that one of their smartest detectives was being sent out to work on the accused man's behalf.

CHAPTER VIII

NO WAY OUT

CLEVER though the detective was, it did not seem to desperate Alison that what he discovered was going to help very much. He pinned his wits down to questioning Anna. He guessed that Mrs. Manning had left her that income for some big favor, and he haunted the house where she was staying.

She had come back, a grim, menacing figure, moving about the village, keeping her own counsel. Not even the smart detective could get much out of her.

"I will speak at the trial," she said, and closed her mouth like a rat trap.

The man told Alison that he was convinced Anna was at the bottom of it all.

"She must have mailed the letters. If I could only make her talk!"

Sometimes Alison wondered how she could go on from day to day with that thing hanging over her head. She was allowed to see Dale, and she found him bearing up wonderfully.

"Delmarsh is a splendid fellow, and I'm glad you got him for me. He's convinced that he will pull me through."

How wonderful he was! He was meeting this great adversity with his head up. They kissed, as if they could never let each other go. Tears stung her eyes as his arms released her, but she brushed them away fiercely. She would not break down before him.

"Whatever happens, darling," he said hoarsely, "I want you to believe that you did nothing wrong. Our love was the sweet and wonderful thing we believed it was, and we never wronged Serena. I've made a will, leaving everything I have to you. Serena's fortune was quite big enough for Jumbo."

She did not let him see how his words stabbed her. She smiled, forcing herself to appear calm. The moment she was outside, however, gasping sobs tore her self-control to shreds. She stumbled into the car. He had made a will! In spite of his brave words, Dale himself did not believe that he would be proved innocent!

She found herself praying, wild, frantic prayers.

And then the day came on which the trial was to begin. Although she was not to be called as a witness, and although her father implored her to keep away, Alison was adamant. Whatever happened, she must be there! Sometimes Dale might look at her and get courage and hope from her.

"I must go, daddy!" she said frantically. "I love him so, and it's all I can do now. What do I care for the crowds, or people staring at me, or their whispers, or their curiosity? The morbid interest of the crowds will pass me by, as though it didn't exist! I'm with Dale all the time. My body may be here, but my spirit is with him!"

It was terrible at the trial, those first days. It was not hard to guess the feeling about her husband. Public sentiment was not with him—it was

against him! The deepest emotions of the human heart had been touched. One woman, a cripple, lying helpless, while her husband was unfaithful; that was how the crowd looked at it. And when Alison first came through she heard a hiss. It frightened her, because she realized how deadly was the case against her husband.

"So it's as bad as that!" said Alison, trembling. "You think him guilty!"

The jury was chosen at last, and then witnesses began to be called, servants who had been in the house. Some told of Dale's devotion to Serena, but all mentioned Alison's visits to the house. Always it seemed as though they had planned this thing, he and she together. Even her father's evidence went against them.

"You were the late Mrs. Manning's medical practitioner?"

"I was."

"You never noticed any symptoms of her being poisoned?"

"Never!"

"You gave a certificate without a thorough examination?"

"I gave heart failure as the cause of death."

"You are a friend of Dale Manning?"

"I am!"

"You were sorry for him?"

"I was!"

"In what way?"

"The late Mrs. Manning was a very jealous, morbid woman. She could not bear her husband out of her sight. She was always repining over her loss of activity. She was neurotic, and I have heard her question her little son as to which he loved best, upbraiding him for not choosing her. Indeed I wanted him sent away; it was bad for the child."

"Was it possible for Dale Manning to go into your office?"

"Quite possible," said the old doctor fiercely.

"Was he ever left alone there?"

"Not that I can remember, but it was possible. There was no reason why I shouldn't leave Dale Manning in my office."

"Was there poison handy?"

"Dale Manning was and is my friend! If I suspected every one who came into my office of wanting to steal my poison I'd have to knock off work and watch them."

But the doctor's indignation, and his stanch assurance that Dale was incapable of poisoning his wife, was no good.

Then the people who had received letters, which they had taken to the village constable, were called.

Those letters! Alison's heart seemed to race like a wild thing in her breast. Her deathly cheeks were scarlet; shame enveloped her as a cloud. Always it was charged that she and Dale were in love.

He is in love with Alison Graham, the doctor's daughter. She brought me the sleeping powders to-night. I heard them whispering outside. What were they saying? Were they wondering whether to-morrow they'd be free, with no one in between? Or were they asking themselves how long the poison would take? Oh, I'm afraid! No one I can trust! Please do something about it! Go to the police and say I'm afraid!

SERENA MANNING.

Each letter was written in similar language.

And then Anna was called.

SHE sat there on the witness stand, clad in heavy black. Looking at her, Alison felt a quick stab of fear. Anna Sanderson hated them both, she was sure of that. Even at first, when she had started taking Jumbo out of the dark house, and making his life a joyous thing, Anna had resented it—

Just as they had all expected, the maid's evidence was damning. Of one thing there could be no doubt, she declared: "Most certainly Alison Graham and Dale Manning had been lovers before Mrs. Manning's death."

"Did you witness any love making between them?"

"I saw their eyes! The mistress knew it, too. And then, on the day of the funeral, when I was leaving, I stood outside the door where he and she were and heard what they said. 'The thought of you has been like a cool breeze in the desert!' Dale Manning said that, and she answered: 'I've been so shamed whenever I've thought of that night before! She lying there, perhaps even then breathing her last, and you and I— Oh, Dale—we kissed!' She came out then and caught me. She knew what I thought about her, knew I'd seen her goings-on. I told her right then that Mrs. Manning trusted me, and that there were some that could hardly wait until she was cold in her coffin before they stepped into her shoes!"

A cry of strangled horror broke

from Alison's lips. She put up her hands to stifle it, then resolutely put them down. This woman was twisting innocent things into wickedness! She looked across at Dale bravely.

"Brazen hussy!" some one cried, and was quickly silenced.

The color drained from Alison's face, leaving it white. She was injuring her husband by being there. People would misunderstand. Yet how could she stay away and let them think she was not standing by?

And now Vivian Delmarsh got to his feet and put his battery of quick-fire questions. It was soon to be seen what he was up to. Anna Sanderson knew the contents of her late mistress's will. He wanted to prove that she had committed the murder so that she would more quickly come into the benefit.

Anna viewed him with complete self-control.

"I loved my mistress, and she paid me well while she was alive. She was a saint!"

There was a distinct rustle in the court at that. People were remembering with aversion what the old doctor had said. Anna went on:

"I had no cause to wish her death. Besides, should I have raked it all up if I committed the murder, when everything was so satisfactorily quiet?"

"Raked it up?" questioned the counsel.

"Yes! I mailed the letters to Judge Small and the Reverend Burnham, and when they took no heed I mailed three others. My mistress gave them every chance. She talked it over with me before she died. 'Anna,' she said as she lay there, tortured with misery, 'if I wrong them, if they are not slowly doing me to death, then I do not wish to bring this thing to light. But, Anna, if they become engaged—mail those two letters, and if no notice is taken mail these three!' And I did, and then the exhumation took place and proved that Mrs. Manning was murdered!"

The counsel could not shake her.

During that terrible day old Dr. Graham's hair grew perceptibly whiter. Alison felt as though she had grown into an old, old woman, as though a thousand years had passed over her, leaving her broken, desperate. It ended in sheer terror for Alison. They took her out by a side door, into the car, but as the car threaded its way between crowds of people to the hotel where she was staying a stone crashed through the glass of the windshield. The girl shivered back against the cushions, her face lifeless. They all believed that she had been the evil influence in Dale's life, had made him commit murder! Murder!

As her miserable eyes went out of the window of the car she saw already placards appearing as if by magic: "Latest news of the Manning murder!"

Was Dale going to be proved guilty? Was the man she loved going to the electric chair?

CHAPTER IX

THE TERRIBLE WAITING

HER father came to her in the hotel. He had seen her counsel, and knew what a struggle it would be to get Dale free. Everything was dead against him; there wasn't a chance in a hundred that he would escape.

As the old man came into the room Alison jumped to her feet. He looked so haggard, so changed from the happy, cheerful father who had always

stood beside her in all her childish troubles.

"Is it as bad as that, daddy?" she said desperately.

"My dear, now is the time to be brave. We've got to hope. We must trust in a Power higher than our own."

"I'm so frightened, daddy!" She clung to him, the child again, the piteous, broken-hearted child whom he had comforted so often, but he could not comfort her now.

"Tell me what Mr. Delmarsh thinks? Don't hide it from me, daddy; I must know. I was watching the jury. They hate me; they think Dale did this thing because of me."

"That's one thing that Delmarsh said: he thinks it would be better for you to keep away to-morrow."

"He thinks I'm injuring Dale?" she asked.

"Not exactly that, but he thinks it would be easier for Dale himself."

"He doesn't understand," said Alison drearily.

"Dale wants to keep it all from you. It's only natural."

He turned away and moved to the window and stared out. Down below in the streets the newsboys were shouting: "All About the Big Moider!" A woman's agony of soul and a man's torture were being written up for the crowd. Oh, it was useless to mind! Justice had to be done, and people thought that Dale had committed this crime. Suddenly she was at his side, her hands clutching at his arm.

"Father, I want your real opinion. If you were one of the jury what would you say?"

"Guilty!" The word was out before he realized.

She quivered for a moment, and then stiffened.

"What do you think yourself? Deep in your heart do you believe Dale did it?"

"No, Alison!" said the old doctor gravely. "I've gone into it thoroughly. The evidence is damning, there's no doubt about that. If I didn't know Dale I'd be swept off my feet, but I'd as soon believe I did it myself in some moment of madness."

"Thank you, daddy! Then if Dale is innocent we're to go on trusting." She turned away and held up her hands. "God—if there is a God—help us now!" she cried wildly.

SHE kept away the next day. Every moment seemed like an hour, every hour a day. Evidence piled up while she was away, and she not to hear—not to know how it was going! She felt she would have gone mad during that terrible day. When her father came in one look at his face told her that nothing had transpired to alter Dale's case.

"Only a miracle can save him!" said the doctor.

"I'm going to-morrow, father! Whatever happens I must be there. I can't stay here!"

She was moving up and down the room, and he looked at her pitifully. Poor Alison! She had changed so much; ten years couldn't have made the change in his girl that these last weeks had done. Into the round contours of her face had crept a look of tragic resignation. And yet, even as he looked, it changed and became a fierce determination never to be resigned.

"The judge is going to give his summing-up to-morrow. Delmarsh believes it will all be over by five o'clock."

"I must go!" she cried desperately.

He hesitated for a moment, and then

turned as a knock came at the door and Vivian Delmarsh was announced.

He came in looking at her sympathetically.

"Mrs. Manning," he said, "I suppose your father has told you that things are going badly for your husband. The jury is not difficult to read; they believe him guilty. For your own sake, and his, I beg you not to come to the court to-morrow."

"Oh, but I must! I must!" said Alison fiercely.

"Don't you realize that if the jury's verdict is guilty—" He paused.

"I know what you mean," said Alison with a bitter laugh. "Do you think hearing that would be any worse than listening to my thoughts? I'm going all the same. He deserves it as much as I do—or as little as I do!"

He turned and went out. He was conscious that he had done his best, but —he had failed! Alas, he knew that already. However wonderful his speech on the morrow, he hadn't the slightest real hope that his client would get off.

Then the detective entered the room, to give his report.

"I'm quite convinced that if this Anna were to speak there's something back of her mind, but how we can make her speak I don't know. She's as hard as the nether millstone. She seems to hate your husband so virulently that I believe she would be glad if the worst happened."

"Was she there to-day?" asked Alison tremulously.

"Yes. She's a strange woman! If only one could find out what is going on behind that mask!"

Then he, too, went and the girl was left alone.

She didn't sleep that night. She was thinking of Dale. Was he hopeless, too? Was he going through his Gethsemane? Justice! Was it possible for justice to be done when circumstantial evidence piled up, made it appear that a sin had been committed? She tossed and turned restlessly, thinking of those quiet days before Serena had died, when she had looked after Jumbo. What games they had had in the garden with Rags! Oh, for the old days to be back again before this deadly thing had happened. And then that day at the fair, and coming home, and the flat tire and Dale kissing her! If sin there had been that had been the moment! And yet, Alison knew that not consciously had she fallen into temptation. Had she not also determined to leave the place? She had even meant to make a clean breast of it to her father, so that he would see that she must go away. She could get a position in another town, far away from Dale.

Then that wonderful day when he had come back from his travels, all unexpectedly, and she had been playing at the piano, and he had come up behind her and kissed her. And then that wonderful honeymoon! Each memory was a pearl on the chain of life. But the chain was broken now, and all she had left was the cross.

She cried piteously, like a broken-hearted child. But when morning came there was a new steadfastness in her face.

CHAPTER X

THE VERDICT

DALE'S night had been more peaceful. Conscious as he was of his innocence, it was for Alison that he worried. His counsel had let him know she was determined to be present.

One thing he had made sure: her future was secure. He asked for pen and pencil. He wanted Alison to get a letter next morning on entering the court, wanted to feel he could comfort her a little.

My Own Darling:

You and I know, whatever the result of this trial, that I am innocent of the black sin I am charged with. Serena, poor misguided soul, was insane. I see that now. A kind of jealous mania it was. You see, I never loved her as she wanted—I couldn't! And I believe she meant to hold me always!

He paused and looked into space, seeing Serena, poor Serena, with her distorted views, and even now feeling sorry for her. Then, with a sigh, he went on with the letter.

If I am brought in guilty I want you to realize that I am yours, my love, in life—in death! My love for you has been worth—even this! It is the best thing in me. It is part of my very soul. Afterward, if things go wrong—and I fear they may—I want you to take Jumbo and go away. Your father will go, too. Sell everything, and take another name, start again, and think of me as one of the beloved dead. You and I know how innocent a love ours was. I would have died to save you this, and yet I feel that even death could not keep us from our love!

God keep you near Him. Don't lose faith—I am not. Somewhere, above the black fog, a star is shining!

I love you so, and I will not think my love has been the worst thing I could offer you, for how could the best be evil?

Ah, love! There is no death for us!

Your lover and your husband,

Dale.

The letter was given to Alison as she came into court, and she read it through, and it was as if a new life entered into her. Such love as theirs was not evil—it was good!

So when the court assembled she was composed; there was a strange new beauty about her. Young though she was, she was schooled to go through with this, the darkest hour of her life. Her thoughts were all for Dale, and as he was brought in the smile that winged its way to him was full of reassurance and hope.

She was clad in a squirrel coat and a close-fitting helmet. She looked very, very lovely, with a spirituelle, far-away beauty, and she looked but a girl for all the agony she had endured.

She seemed buoyed up with some strength that wasn't her own. But as the case started again, as those long-drawn-out moments passed, as those terrible words beat like a drum on her mind, she flinched. How much could one endure and live? Then Dale's counsel, Vivian Delmarsh, addressed the jury, speaking fluently, easily, using every twist and turn to beat down the circumstantial evidence against his client. He was clever, clever! They were turning—not so sure—he worked on their sympathies, showed Dale as the kind, considerate husband; Alison, just a little friend who helped with the boy, little more than a child herself—

Listening to him, Alison believed that, in spite of everything, he would win his case. Oh, God! He must, he must!

But after there had to come the judge's summing-up. Just it was, impartially so—stating the case as he saw it. In gentle, quiet tones he spoke, not emphatically, but as if reading a book.

"Here is the position. A woman invalided, a man strong, vigorous, full of life. The other woman, young too, and healthy and vigorous. In spite of the invalid wife love springs up, and

no hope ever of its consummation. And the man hears the doctor's diagnosis. She may live for years, this helpless woman, lying like a log, demanding of him ceaseless attention. She is a jealous woman, will not allow him freedom, but desires his constant presence in her room. Bit by bit, resistance is worn away, so that in the end the man tells the other woman that he loves her, kisses her. It's for you, the jury, to say whether this state of mind caused the defendant to poison his wife."

And so on, that gentle, quiet voice stating the case as the witnesses had spoken it. In his judicious tones he dealt with Anna's disclosures. Somehow it was all so deadly.

And then, at last, the jury filed out. While they debated it seemed to Alison as though life stopped. The court was crowded, yet how deathly quiet it was! Outside life went on, she supposed. Once upon a time there had been such a thing as happiness, and innocence, and sweetness. Never again, never again!

Half an hour passed—an hour. That meant that they could not agree on a verdict instantly. Some one was holding out, believing his guiltless. Or, perhaps some one was holding out, believing him guilty. The palms of her hands were wet; she couldn't bear it! She felt she was going mad! She was mad, and this was part of her delirium! What was Dale thinking? Was he hopeless, or was he living, too, in the past, when he and she had known such happiness together? The moments ticked by! She had not thought it possible for a human being to stand such a strain, to go through such an agony of soul and still exist! There were moments when she felt that she was dying in reality.

Then, at last, there came a stir. The jury had decided upon a verdict. In a moment she would know whether it was life or death, whether Dale was to die for a thing he had never done! She sat so still that it was like being paralyzed. How long they were! Why couldn't they put her out of her misery! But perhaps they were going to plunge her forevermore into a worse hell! Be merciful and be quick—be merciful and be slow: which was it to be? Through a mist she looked across at Dale when he was brought in. How quiet he was, almost as though it had nothing to do with him. His face was white and haggard, but there was a quiet peace about him, as though some unseen presence were supporting him. It gave her courage to look at him. She could not smile; she could only just look at him.

The names of the jury were called. Go on! Go on! Spin out the agony!

And now the foreman of the jury stood up. He was a little thin man, with sharp ferrety eyes and thick reddish hair, and he cleared his throat nervously before speaking. What was he going to say? She heard one word:

"Guilty."

Guilty!

She died then! She knew that she would never live again. It was as though she had been shot through the heart, and was a mangled, wounded, wild thing, hunted to the death.

The judge would have to give sentence of death, but she was dead already, dead—as Serena was dead, finished!

And then something happened! There was a stir in the court, an usher making room for some one.

Anna came rushing wildly forward.

"Stop!" she said. She held out her hands; in one of them was a yellow

envelope. "I've got to tell you everything," she said in a clear but awful voice. "It's retribution! I've just heard that my son has been run over, killed, coming from school. He is dead! Retribution!"

For a moment there was panic in the court, and then it became utterly silent. There was a quick conclave between the judge and the counsel; then, once more, Anna mounted the witness stand. A broken Anna—an Anna who was going to speak the truth at last!

"DALE MANNING never loved his wife as she loved him!" The woman's voice was queer, almost as if she were choking, yet every word echoed and reëchoed in the court, and pierced to the farthest corner. "She loved him crazily, madly. She was good to me; she gave me money. Then, one day, in an effort to cheer her up, he brought Alison Graham to visit her. Young, and pretty and carefree, she showed to my poor mistress the outside world as she had not seen it for so many long and dreary days. Mrs. Manning knew then that Miss Graham was always in and out of the house. Her husband had engaged her to help with the teaching of Jumbo, their little son. Down below in the drawing-room Miss Graham used to play. Mr. Manning adored music, once had listened to his wife's. She was on the rack from early morn till eve.

"It's over, sweetheart, all over! Don't cry any more!"

"Long before they knew it themselves, she knew that Mr. Manning

had fallen in love with Miss Graham. In her jealous fury she would lure him on to talk about Alison, and watch his face light up. He was a man, not realizing how, when he was away, she lived it all over again, her jealous mind fed on his words, so that she literally went with him wherever he went, saw them meet, watched their happiness. She knew she was the barrier, and she knew she could not go on living like that. And so she made me help. She hated Alison Graham; she did not want her to marry her husband. She wanted him for her own! And, rather than let those two be happy, she meant to have Dale Manning follow her to her grave. She thought of a scheme and she suggested it to me, asked how far I would go for the sake of my boy."

Here, just for a moment, the hard voice broke; the thin, spare frame was convulsed in an agony that went deep to the soul of the miserable woman. An usher handed her a glass of water, and she drank thirstily. Then she went on:

"I was ambitious for my boy. I loved him with an idolatrous love that made me understand her love for her husband. I would have died for him. I did worse! I promised to agree to her insane scheme! By this time she had influenced me to such an extent that I hated Alison Graham too. I believed that she was plotting to win Dale Manning's love, believed he, too, was only waiting for the moment when Mrs. Manning died. So I listened and I promised to carry out her plan! The arsenic I procured myself. Mrs. Manning gave me a week off. I went down to see my boy at school, and I stayed at a farm where it was easy for me to get arsenic—they used it for weed killer. I gave it to Mrs. Manning, and she poisoned herself!" Anna fumbled in her bag and drew out a slip of paper. "Even then I realized that some day I, too, might stand here on a charge of having murdered her, so I made her write this in the event of such a thing happening."

She handed it over to the judge, who read it solemnly aloud:

> "I, Serena Manning, solemnly swear that the scheme by which Anna Sanderson got arsenic, and gave it to me, was my own idea. This is a solemn oath. I poisoned myself! Life became too hideous to live, knowing that Dale hated me alive. But, dying, I yet shall speak. He is my husband; now and after death I claim him for my own.
>
> "SERENA MANNING."

There were two signatures there.

Anna went on, her voice low now, desperate:

"To-day when they brought me that wire telling me my son was dead, I knew that I had sinned, and that his death was my punishment. I did not wish any longer to see Mr. Manning killed. Before that I felt he deserved it; she made me like that. You understand. Dale Manning is innocent." Her face was quivering, twisted.

"This evidence proves that Dale Manning is innocent," said the judge.

Such a thunder of applause rang out that the next words were not heard. The crowd that had been so sure he was a murderer had swung round to the other extreme now. They shouted; they yelled; pandemonium broke loose.

Over the heads of the crowd Alison's eyes met her husband's. The nightmare was over; the miracle had happened! Innocent! Free to go away and hide themselves from all these eager, dreadful eyes! Free to live out their homely, quiet life! To pick up the threads again! Free to play with

Jumbo! To forget the misery, the horror, the death that had almost fallen! To be happy. Some one was shaking her hand, but she was like one in a trance. Somehow she could not begin to think. Dale was free. Innocent, not guilty!

As one in a dream she saw Anna collapse, saw her taken out. She heard a murmur from the judge's bench. Miraculously the court was cleared. She tried to move, but her legs were far too shaky; they would not support her.

And then Dale was beside her. They did not speak, either of them; he caught her hands, and held them. They looked at each other, looked as drowning men look when land is sighted, looked as those look who have seen hell face to face and have come out unscathed.

"What can I do to make up to you for all you've suffered, Alison!" he said in a broken voice.

"What can I do, Dale, to make you forget!" she whispered.

He caught her to him in a quick, fierce embrace. Then he flung back his head.

"Let's get out of here!" he said. "I can't think in this place."

Dr. Graham led the way; out by a back door to the car that was awaiting them they went, Did they hope to escape that frantic, cheering throng? They were mistaken if they did, for it took the efforts of several policemen to force a way for them. And it was almost impossible for the car to make its way through, but in the end they were back at their hotel, alone!

The old doctor kept wiping his face with his handkerchief. He hoped never to go through such a grueling again. He knew that he would be haunted by the echo of the jury's verdict all his life. And then suddenly Anna's voice! And the nightmare ended!

"Thank you, sir, for sticking to me, and believing in me!" said Dale, as he caught his father-in-law's hand. "I'll never forget it! The evidence was dead against me, and I don't blame my friends for believing I had done it. But in spite of all you still believed me innocent!"

"As you were proved to be, my dear boy!" said Dr. Graham huskily. "Now let me diagnose what is best for you two for the next few months. Go away; travel. Try to forget all this. Regard it as some page to be turned over and forgotten. And then, when it is faded from your minds, return and start life out again."

Just for a moment Dale was tempted.

"What do you say, Alison? All I want to do now is to make amends."

"Make amends for loving me, Dale?" she said, smiling up at him. "My dear, I want to do what you want. Deep down I feel that it would be best to go home now, face the music, let it die down as soon as possible."

"That's what I feel," said Dale. "I've suffered so much that this seems nothing. If we stayed away we'd only have to face it all later on!"

So they went back to find the place almost mad with joy at their return. They got free from the crowd at the station at last and drove back to their home, where they found Jumbo waiting for them.

"Daddy! Ally!" cried Jumbo eagerly. "Did you bring me that Indian's suit from New York?"

Dale looked guiltily at Alison.

"We forgot your size," said Alison swiftly. "You've got to be measured."

"Rags caught a rat yesterday! I kept it for if you'd be back in time to see it."

They laughed, sweet, wholesome laughter. They had thought there was no more laughter in the world; they had thought there was only horror, and deathly misery, and shame and grief.

And now she was crying in her husband's arms, held close against his heart.

"It's over, sweetheart! All over! Don't cry any more," he whispered brokenly.

"I'm crying because I'm so happy!" said Alison.

THE GLEAM

LIFE has turned her warmth from me,
With her shrouding cloak held tight
Mirth has swept, with scornful glance,
Out into the far-flung night.
Has adventure hurried by,
Darkly seen, as through a glass?
Still I laugh into the sky,
Loveliness can never pass!

Romance one time touched my hand,
Touched my hand—and turned away!
Wealth once made a sunset gleam
In the clouds of yesterday.
Age is reaching out to me,
Out to me—of all the mass;
Still this song is in my soul,
Loveliness can never pass!

—*Elizabeth Chisholm*

"Mother, there will never be a wedding. Jeremy has jilted me!"

Jilted

By JUDITH MacKAY

As her daughter came into the room, Mrs. Collins looked up from her sewing with a tried and patient smile.

"Darling, where have you been all morning?" she asked reproachfully. "You know you have a fitting this afternoon, and that we've arranged to stop in at Marston's to select the wedding invitations. There's so much to do, and so little time. I should think you—"

But there she broke off, silenced by something she saw in Felicia's face; something that frightened her, she knew not why.

"There's no use ordering invitations, mother." The girl spoke in a small, cold voice that sounded strange to her own ears. "There isn't going to be any wedding."

"No wedding!" For a moment Mrs. Collins stared, and then the sheer absurdity of it made her laugh. "What *are* you talking about, dearest?"

"There isn't going to be a wedding," Felicia repeated, still in that small, cold voice. "Not now—or ever. I had a letter from Jeremy this morning. He doesn't want to marry me."

Her mother forced a sickly smile. "You silly children," she said indulgently, "with your lovers' quarrels!"

"This isn't a lovers' quarrel, mother. This is the end. Jeremy

wants to marry a girl in New York, the daughter of his uncle's partner. He has—jilted me."

There! She had said it! She had brought out the naked, ugly word. For nearly three years she had been engaged to Jeremy Blaine, and now, less than a month before the day set for their marriage, he had written that it was all a mistake, that he did not love her any more, that he did love somebody else.

Jeremy had phrased it more tactfully, of course, but those were the facts behind his soft, regretful phrases. Those were the facts, and they had to be faced.

Slender and tall and proud Felicia stood, her red mouth curving scornfully, and her blue eyes burning dark in her white, stricken face. Young and defenseless and pitifully gallant she stood, putting all her shame and heartbreak into that bleak and bitter word: jilted. Jeremy had jilted her.

With a little whimpering sound Mrs. Collins began to weep into her handkerchief. "Oh, my poor baby!" she said. "My poor, hurt little girl!"

Felicia's hand clenched at her side, unclenched again. "Don't, mother!" she whispered sharply. "Please don't!"

"But your trousseau's nearly finished!" the mother wailed. "Your wedding dress is ordered, and the bridesmaids chosen! What will we do? What will people say? Oh, this is terrible! Terrible!"

Felicia turned suddenly with a feeling of suffocation in her throat. "I—I can't talk any more, mother. I'm going out for a walk."

She ran upstairs for her hat. As she was putting it on she saw in the mirror that she was still wearing her engagement ring. A clear, blue-white diamond it was, set in platinum, with twelve baguet diamonds sunk into the setting.

"It's the loveliest ring I could find," Jeremy had said as he kissed it and slipped it reverently upon her finger. "You're so beautiful, Felicia, you should always have the loveliest of everything!"

Then he had caught her in his arms and kissed her ardently, adoringly, until she had felt faint and weak with happiness.

"Your hair is as soft and dark as sleep," he had said chokingly, "and your eyes are so amazingly and deeply blue. You're so beautiful, so enchanting, and so sweet. Oh, tell me again that you're really going to marry me. That you'll be mine, all mine!"

That had been three years ago, when she was seventeen and just coming into her heritage of loveliness.

THEY had known from the beginning that theirs would have to be a long engagement. Jeremy had two more years of college, and then it would take him another year to get well settled in the job that was waiting for him in his uncle's New York office.

But Felicia hadn't been at all frightened at the prospect of a three-year engagement. It was sweet to dream and to work and to plan for the wonderful time to come, and she had always felt so safe, so secure in Jeremy's love. Other people's love affairs might come to disaster, but not hers! Not hers and Jeremy's!

Now Felicia's hands trembled as she pulled the "loveliest" ring off. Her finger felt queer—empty—without it.

She found a box and paper and twine, and wrapped the ring for mailing. Then in a clear, steady hand she addressed the package to Jeremy.

"Write me that you understand," he had said in his letter. "Write me that you'll always be my friend, as I'll be yours."

But she did not understand; she never would understand. How could he do this thing to her? Better to return the ring without a word than to risk the bitterness and the anguish and reproach her heart might pour into any letter she might try to write.

Very carefully she rouged her cheeks, and drew a lipstick over the soft curves of her mouth before she went out to face the world. No one should see her suffering; no one should know how mortally she had been hurt.

As she registered the little package and tucked the receipt into her pocketbook, Felicia suddenly realized what a sensation her broken engagement would create in Fendwick.

Five years ago Jean Haviland had been engaged to marry Duncan Masters. At the last moment, with white lips and head held high, she had announced that the engagement had been terminated "by mutual consent."

No one had believed it, of course—not the "mutual consent" part. They knew that Jean was crazy about Duncan, and they guessed that he had asked her to release him from his promise. They looked after Jean with pitying eyes, and whispered half sympathetic, half scornful comments behind her back, until the girl could stand it no longer, and she left the town, never to come back.

Felicia resolved suddenly, "I won't make any pretense. I'll tell the truth. I'll tell them all what they'll know anyhow—that Jeremy has jilted me. Jeremy has jilted me!"

It was this resolve, and her gallant, unflinching pride, that made her go to the Country Club dance that Saturday night, just as she had been planning to do.

"I'm not going to hide, weeping in dark corners, while Fendwick talks," she told her cousin Tommy, proudly, when he called to escort her. "I'm going to face it!"

But facing it was harder than anything she had imagined.

As she went into the dressing room the girls who were assembled there stopped talking; stopped with a sudden flushed confusion that said as plainly as words that they had been talking about her, and were surprised at her entrance.

Felicia paused on the threshold, a slender figure in a gown of frosty silver, with eyes that were like pools of blue ice in the stillness of her face.

The dress she wore was one that had been made specially for her trousseau, and she knew that every girl in that room was avidly aware of the fact.

For a moment that seemed like eternity, no one spoke. Then Felicia shrugged her shoulders and gave a little tinkling laugh—a heartbreaking laugh to one who knew the gay and joyous lilt that had been her laughter less than a week ago.

"Well, girls," she said, "here I am—back in circulation again."

Mimi Randolph was the first to catch her breath. She rushed across the room and caught one of Felicia's hands in both of hers as she cooed:

"Honey, is it really true what people are saying—that you've broken your engagement?"

All the eyes in the room focused on Felicia's, curious, probing eyes, like so many daggers mercilessly searching out her heart.

"No, of course it isn't true," she answered softly, mockingly.

A quick murmur of surprise ran about the room.

"But—but—" Mimi Randolph stammered.

"Jeremy broke the engagement," Felicia went on, still in that soft, mocking voice. "Some siren in New York has wooed him away from me, and I'll probably go into a decline, or die of a broken heart or something!"

She took out her compact as she spoke and lightly powdered her small, straight nose.

THEY didn't know what to make of her. Neither did the men.

"Why, I never suspected that Felicia Collins was so hard, so utterly unfeeling," people said, while others added darkly:

"I don't believe for one moment that Jeremy Blaine broke the engagement. She wouldn't come out and say so if he had."

"No," the girls agreed. "She'd never admit it if she'd really been jilted. There's something behind this that we don't understand."

"*I* believe," Mimi Randolph broke in virtuously, "that Felicia's treated Jeremy very badly. Just look at the way she's carrying on with Tommy MacDonald's friend from New York. Why, she's dancing practically every dance with him."

There was resentment in Mimi's look, and in the looks of the other girls, for Tommy's week-end guest had been the target of all feminine glances ever since the moment he had appeared with Tommy at the club. New men were scarce in Fendwick, and a new man like this one a rare prize indeed.

A tall, square-shouldered chap in his middle twenties was Hugh Lambert, with keen gray eyes in a lean, tanned face. He carried himself well, and wore his dinner clothes with quiet distinction. His voice was resonant and well-modulated, with a note of authority running through it, and his manners, the women all agreed, were delightful.

More than one feminine heart had quickened at the sight of this interesting, good-looking stranger, but from the first moment of Felicia's appearance he had devoted himself exclusively to her. Feminine Fendwick was torn between resentment and reluctant admiration for Felicia. They had expected to see her crushed and broken by Jeremy's desertion, and instead she was triumphantly annexing the most eligible man in the room. How had she been able to do it?

Fortunately for Felicia's pride, they had no way of knowing that it wasn't her charms, but Tommy's maneuvering that first inspired Hugh Lambert's attentions. Tommy was fond of his cousin, and had determined to do what he could to help her through this trying evening.

"Look here, Hugh," Tommy had blurted out in embarrassment as the two men dressed for the dance, "will you do something to help me out to-night?"

"Certainly. I'll be delighted."

"I'm taking a girl to the dance—a young cousin of mine—who's going to have rather a bad time of it," Tommy went on awkwardly. "She—well, I can't explain without going into too many details—but there's a special reason why I want her to get a lot of attention to-night. I want her to dance every dance, to be cut in on and—"

"And you want me to do the cutting in," Hugh finished for him amiably. "You want me to act smitten with her charms, and to give her a rush. Is that the idea?"

"If you don't mind, old man."

"Not a bit of it. Delighted to do anything I can, of course."

Hugh suppressed a sigh as he said it, for he assumed that the girl in question was some awkward little wall-flower whom no one else would want to dance with, and that he was letting himself in for an evening of intense boredom.

"These small-town dances are bad enough without that," he told himself ruefully. "Oh, well, it's only one night. I can stand anything for a few hours."

And then he had met Felicia: Felicia slender and lovely in her frosted silver gown, with her smile that was a gallant challenge and her eyes that were deep frozen pools of misery.

This couldn't be the girl Tommy meant! Not this ice princess with the hurt and quivering smile! Why, she was beautiful, and she danced like a feather blown by the wind. Why should this girl have a bad time of it at any dance? Why should she need Tommy's belligerent championship?

But it wasn't long before Hugh heard the gossip, and understood.

"Felicia Collins is terribly attractive, isn't she?" Mimi Randolph murmured as he waltzed with her. "And I do think it's so brave of her to come here to-night. No one expected that she'd show her face. I know that under the circumstances *I* wouldn't go *anywhere*. I wouldn't want *any one* to see me."

Mimi paused expectantly, but Hugh refused to ask the expected question.

"Of course, though, I'm terribly sensitive," she went on anyway, "and Felicia is absolutely unfeeling. Why, if a man jilted me three weeks before my wedding day, with my wedding dress all made, and the bridesmaids asked, and everything, I'd—well, I'd simply commit suicide. I just couldn't stand the disgrace."

"It seems to me," Hugh told her coldly, "that any disgrace belongs to the man in question."

"It ought to be so, oughtn't it?" Mimi said sweetly. "But somehow people don't feel that way. Personally I'm sure that Felicia's everything that's sweet and wonderful, but people are bound to wonder why Jeremy should throw her over at the last minute, especially with her acting so queer and—sort of hard boiled. The whole town's simply seething, of course! Nothing so exciting has happened here since Jean Haviland and Duncan Masters—"

"Jean Haviland?" Hugh interrupted her quickly, glad of a chance to change the subject. "I know a girl in New York of that name."

AT his first opportunity he cut in on Felicia again. He saw with a stab of pity that her face was very white behind its rouge, that her eyes were shadowed with weariness.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "this air is so thick you could cut it with a knife. Couldn't we get outdoors for a little while?"

Felicia acquiesced tiredly. What did it matter what she did, or where she went, or with whom? Her whole being was focused on the effort to keep a smile stamped on her face, to hold her head high.

She had danced with Hugh a dozen times, had lifted provocative eyes to his, and laughed deliciously at his sallies, yet to save her life she could not have told you what he looked like, nor any single thing that he had said. Her mind was blank, all her emotions cold and numb; she moved in a dream.

It was at just such a club dance as this that Jeremy had proposed to her three years ago. She had worn a dress of pale yellow tulle and he had told her that she looked like love itself.

"I thought your eyes would be black to match your hair," he had said, "but they're blue—blue as windflowers, or as larkspurs with the dew still on them. And your mouth is the loveliest thing in all this world!"

Then he had kissed her. It was her first lover's kiss. Other boys had tried to kiss her, but always she had shaken her head and turned her face away. But when Jeremy put his arm about her she had not turned away.

Instead she had stood very still with her heart pounding and the hot color burning in her cheeks, until his mouth had come down hard on hers, and his voice had said over and over, "I love you—I love you."

And now he did not love her any longer. Jeremy had written her that he was sure she felt as he did that theirs had been a sentimental boy-and-girl affair, and was better ended. Jeremy had written her that! Jeremy who had kissed her eyelids and the little hollow in her throat, who had kissed her fingers one by one, and told her that in her beloved hands lay his every chance of happiness on earth.

Felicia's breath caught in a sob; she looked about her wildly. It wasn't true. It couldn't be true! This was some nightmare in which she was moving! She wasn't really here in the moonlight with this stranger, while Jeremy was in New York making love to another girl.

She shivered, and instantly Hugh Lambert's eyes and voice grew warm with solicitude. "You're cold," he said. "I shouldn't have brought you out without a wrap. We'd better—"

"No, no!" she protested, "I'm not cold. Really. Let's not go back."

She couldn't face those merciless probing eyes again so soon. This man at least was a stranger. Before him she didn't have to keep that set smile on her lips, that false gayety in her voice. With him she didn't have to pretend that she was happy. To-morrow he'd go away and she'd never see him again. What difference did it make what he thought of her to-night?

"Let's walk and keep on talking. Please keep on talking," she begged, in a voice she did not know was small and cold and frightened.

And so Hugh talked to her of many things, realizing that she scarcely heard a word he said, until he chanced to remark:

"One of my friends in New York came from Fendwick. Jean Haviland. Perhaps you remember her—"

Jean Haviland! The name burned through to Felicia's consciousness.

"Jean Haviland!" she cried. "You know Jean? She's living in New York? Oh, tell me about her!"

"Why, I don't know what you'd like to know—except that she's well and busy, and quite successful in her work."

"And happy?" Felicia implored him. "Is Jean happy?"

"It's hard to answer that question about any human soul, isn't it? But, yes, I'd say that Jean is as happy as most people."

"She's happy as most people," Felicia repeated after him. "And yet just a few years ago she was like me. She, too, was—jilted."

Hugh didn't pretend not to understand.

"People do get over things, my dear," he said gently. "Even the worst sorrows are dulled by time."

"Well, girls!" she called gayly. "Here I am, back in circulation!"

"I know. I keep telling myself that a year from now none of this will matter, but I can't make it seem true. It doesn't make it any easier to live through to-day."

She shivered again, and her hand went to her heart in a piteous gesture.

"I wish I could talk to Jean," she said. "I wish I could ask her how she lived through those first weeks; how she stood the days when every one was whispering about her and staring at her. How she endured the nights when she couldn't keep from remembering all the sweet, faithless things her lover had vowed to her. I wish I could see Jean. Perhaps she could tell me how a girl who has been jilted learns to laugh again."

FELICIA was speaking more to herself than to Hugh. Indeed, she scarcely realized that she said the words aloud. But when, less than a week later, a letter came from Jean Haviland inviting her to New York, Felicia understood that Hugh must have arranged it.

She sobbed with relief as she read the invitation. It was like the sudden opening of a door in the prison wall.

It would be heaven just to get away

from Fendwick with its daily reminders, from every one she knew, and every familiar surrounding. To escape to the cold impersonality of a big city, where she could get a new perspective, and rebuild her life! No one could know what this chance meant to her—no one but Jean, with her own remembered anguish.

Sitting in the train, a slender, blue-eyed girl in a dark traveling suit and a bright little hat, Felicia determined that she wasn't coming back to Fendwick for a long time, not till all the gossips had forgotten her and her ruined romance.

She would stay with Jean just long enough to get her bearings in New York, and then she would find herself a job, and living quarters of her own.

It would be ridiculous, she thought, to go back to her job in the Fendwick bank. That job had been all right as a stop-gap until she married Jeremy, but it offered no future to a girl who was not going to be married; a girl who must make a success in the business world since she'd be dependent on her own earnings all her life.

"I *must* be a success," Felicia told herself, clasping tight little hands in her lap as the train carried her swiftly toward the city. "I must prove to Jeremy, and to the world, and to myself, that I'm something more than the girl he jilted. I must, I *will* be a success."

Her small, childish face set in new lines of determination and something grim touched for a moment the ingenuous blueness of her eyes.

It was a calm and poised Felicia who got off the train at the Pennsylvania Station to find Jean there waiting for her.

For a moment the two girls looked at each other uncertainly, for it was five years since they had met. Then Jean put out her hand with a welcoming smile.

"You're Felicia, aren't you? I remember your black hair and your Irish blue eyes. Who'd have imagined that you'd grow up so pretty! Last time I saw you you were a skinny, long-legged child with one of those awful bands on your teeth!"

"How I used to hate that band!" Felicia laughed, unexpectedly at ease with this girl she had half longed, half dreaded to meet. "I'm grateful now, though, that they made me wear it."

"I should think you would be," Jean said, looking approvingly at the beautifully even, white teeth that Felicia's smile revealed. "You could pose for a tooth paste ad! Come this way! We'll get a taxi."

As they rode uptown, the two girls were studying each other beneath their light, inconsequential chatter.

Jean had changed almost beyond recognition, Felicia thought. Five years ago she had been a soft, rather indefinite girl, cast in the same mold as a dozen other Fendwick maidens. Now, at twenty-eight, she was distinctly a personality.

Her close-cropped hair, and well-tailored, mannish clothes suited her style, and her brusque manners and good-humored, somewhat cynical smile rounded out the picture of a prosperous, self-assured young business woman.

As the owner of a small employment agency, Jean made a good living, and she had a delightfully furnished apartment in a good neighborhood.

"YOU do yourself rather well, don't you, Jean?" Felicia remarked admiringly as the two girls dined together.

"Yes, I like my comforts," the other answered lightly. "No hotel rooms or one-room apartments for mine. I like a place big enough to entertain my friends. A guest room is a luxury that most New Yorkers do without, but I enjoy my guests too much."

She smiled warmly as she said it, for each day deepened her liking for this slim, gallant girl.

"I'm awfully grateful to you, Felicia, for not being weepy and woebegone," she said impulsively. "I was terribly afraid when I invited you to come that I was letting myself in for a siege of sobs and tears. I didn't know you were such a sport."

"My tears have all been shed," Felicia told her simply. "At first I used to cry all night, but that's all over and done with now. It's almost as if the part of me that loved Jeremy was dead; dead of its own suffering."

"Let's hope it is," Jean said, but there was no belief in her voice. "It doesn't pay to feel too intensely about anything."

"I never will again. I'm armored now against anything the world can do."

Jean doubted it. Looking at Felicia's tender mouth and softly shining eyes, Jean doubted it very much, but she was too wise to say so. Instead she went on:

"I heard about a job to-day that you might get, Felicia. A partner in a brokerage house wants a secretary. He's asking for an older girl, but if you can get an interview, you might talk him into giving you a trial. Your experience in Fendwick ought to help, and your personality, too."

"I'll get it," Felicia said with quiet conviction. "I'll go see him the first thing in the morning make him give it to me."

And to Jean's admiration and surprise, she did.

"When do you start in?"

"Monday. He wanted me to come right away, but I held him off. I've got to have a few days to look around and find where I'm going to live."

"I've been thinking that over, Felicia. How'd you like to team up with me? There's a bigger apartment empty on the floor above. If we took it together we could afford a part-time maid to clean up and get our dinner, and we wouldn't have to eat out. What do you say?"

"I say you're wonderfully, heavenly kind, Jean, but I can't take advantage of your goodness. You're just proposing it for my sake."

"Nonsense! I'm doing it entirely for my own selfish comfort. It will cut down my living expenses and—well, I guess I've been lonesome without realizing it for some one from back home. I've always hated the thought of living with any one, but you're different. I—I like you a lot, Felicia."

"And I love you with all my heart," the younger girl cried impulsively. "I'll never, never be able to repay you for your goodness to me."

"There's the doorbell!" Jean said, embarrassed by any expression of gratitude, and glad of the chance to change the subject. "I bet it's Hugh. He said he might drop in to-night."

"Hugh?"

"Hugh Lambert . . . Oh, hello, Hugh; come right in. You know Felicia."

A faint, embarrassed color came into Felicia's face as she greeted this man. She was remembering how much of her personal life she had revealed to him when she thought he was a stranger whom she'd never meet again.

"I'm awfully glad to see you again," he said with a warm, welcoming smile, "and particularly to see you looking so well. You're changed somehow. What have you been doing to yourself?"

Felicia laughed deliciously at his intent and puzzled glance.

"It's your hair! You're doing it differently."

"And my New York clothes!" She dimpled. "Please admire them. They came from one of the smartest shops."

"And the excitement of success," Jean added her explanation. "Congratulations are in order, Hugh. Felicia's landed a job, a good one, and she's going to stay in New York."

"Then New York is indeed to be congratulated," Hugh said gravely. "We must do something to celebrate. Let's see a show and go dancing afterward. I'll telephone Bill Tucker and see if he's free to-night."

BILL TUCKER was nice. Felicia liked him. But not half so nice as Hugh. Strange that she had not remembered how good-looking, how charming Hugh was.

That night in Fendwick she had been too wrapped up in her grief to realize him as an individual. He'd been just some one to dance with, some one to help her through an intolerable situation.

Now at the theater, and later at the supper club, she looked at him with a feeling of delighted discovery. She liked his gray eyes, and the lean, tanned contours of his face. She liked the ruggedness of his jaw and chin, and the smile that lighted his features every time his eyes met hers. She liked his decisiveness, and his gentleness, and his sudden flashing charm—in fact, she liked everything about him.

"Having a good time, little one?"

Felicia drew in a long, deep breath of excitement. "A marvelous time!" she said, and then broke off, startled at the realization that it was true.

She was having a good time, enjoying every moment of it. She, Felicia Collins, the girl who had been shamed and jilted, who had expected never to laugh again, was here in this brightly lighted restaurant with a jazz band playing, and she was thrilling with youth and vitality and high anticipation.

Three weeks ago she had longed so passionately to die that her thoughts had circled round and round the idea of suicide, yet in this moment she could feel delight in the mere fact that she was twenty and pretty; that her dress of rose chiffon was delightfully becoming, and that the man she was dancing with was congenial and attentive!

Felicia felt a little rush of gratitude toward Hugh as they finished their dance and sat down at the table again with the others.

"He's the nicest sort of companion," she thought. "It's a great piece of luck to find a friend like him waiting for me in New York!"

Jean was telling Bill about the apartment.

"We'll give a house-warming as soon as we're settled," she was saying. "And you and Hugh are the first guests we invite. What do you say, Hugh—will you come?"

"I'll be the first to arrive!" he promised. "And I'll bring the old mandolin if you'll make Bill bring his uke."

"We'll ask Marge and Stanley, and Ruth, and Jim Hopkins," Jean went on planning.

"And Hi Deevers," Hugh prompt-

ed her. "And that little blonde—what's her name?"

"Madge MacAllister?"

"Yes. Madge and her boy friend. They're fun on a party."

Jean and Hugh went on making up a list of guests, with occasional help from Bill, while Felicia let her glance roam idly about the room. It didn't matter to her whom they asked to the party. She knew no one in New York.

No one—except Jeremy Blaine.

Felicia froze suddenly in her chair. Her heart had stopped beating, and her mind was burning with a cold, clear flame. She was going to invite Jeremy Blaine to the party. She was going to invite Jeremy and his new sweetheart, Dorothy James.

No use arguing it with herself; the decision had come to her suddenly, irrevocably. It was as if all this had been planned before, as if she were simply following a course that had been laid out for her long ago. At this party she and her faithless lover should meet again.

"That makes eighteen," Jean was saying. "We can't take care of many more."

"There are a couple of people I'd like to ask if it won't crowd things too much," Felicia heard herself saying in a calm, cool voice. "Jeremy Blaine and his fiancée. I think it would be fun to have them."

Jean's eyes flew to hers in a glance of quick understanding. "Why, yes, of course." She spoke coolly, too. "How stupid of me not to have thought of Jeremy. Any other people you know in New York?"

"Regular old home night, eh what?" Bill Tucker asked facetiously.

Hugh said nothing at all. After a first puzzled glance at Felicia he relapsed into a frowning silence. As soon as Bill and Felicia left the table to dance, however, he turned to Jean and asked abruptly:

"Why do you want Blaine at the party? It seems to me—"

"Why not?" she interrupted him. "He and Felicia are bound to meet somewhere sooner or later."

"That's true enough, but I can't see the use of hurrying their meeting."

"Perhaps," Jean said slowly, "Felicia prefers to meet him on her own ground, at a time when she seems happy and triumphant, with her friends about her, and the excitement of a new job and a new home upholding her. At a time when she can show Jeremy that his desertion has not broken her heart nor ruined her life, when he can see for himself how beautifully she is adjusted to a future without him.

"And perhaps," Jean added with a little impish, upward glance, "Felicia wants a chance to find out once and for all whether she still wants Jeremy badly enough to steal him back from the other girl. These are highly competitive times, Hugh, my dear, and we poor women have to fight to get the men we want, and then fight equally hard to keep them."

"Felicia wouldn't have Jeremy back!" he broke in angrily.

Something in the sharpness of his tone arrested Jean's attention. She looked up at him, her eyes quizzical, her lips parted. Then swiftly her lashes fell to cover a secret smile that was dawning in her eyes.

"Hugh, will you be very attentive to Felicia the night of the party?" she asked softly. "I mean, if Jeremy is there? Nothing will help her pride so much—"

"You needn't worry about that," Hugh said shortly. "The problem will be—"

He broke off, frowning and biting his lip, but Jean knew without his finishing just what the problem was.

"EVENING dress, of course," Jean had decreed. "With a neck and shoulders like yours, Felicia, you should wear it on every possible occasion."

Felicia's dress was startlingly becoming. Black and white poppies scattered against a background of tangerine crape, with tiny crystal beads shining in the heart of each flower. It was made in the new fashion that her tall slenderness wore so well — narrow, close-fitting bodice, long flared skirt billowing in soft folds about her ankles. Her slippers were black, with crystal buckles, and with her white skin and gleaming black hair, she made a picture that would not be soon forgotten.

"Your dress will simply kill all the others in the room," Jean said complacently. "I don't mind, 'cause nobody ever sees me anyhow, but some of the other girls are going to hate you. Especially those with dresses in pastel shades."

"It was a frightful extravagance," Felicia said, with no regret in her voice. "It's so sensational that I won't be able to wear it more than three or four times."

"If you never wear it more than once, it will be worth it," Jean assured her. "You look as if you'd stepped right out of a Paris fashion sheet."

"Jean, you're such a comfort to me! I do want to look well to-night."

"You look beautiful, ravishing! And if you don't believe me, just look in the eyes of the men."

A wave of color came up under Felicia's fair skin. Now that the night was actually here, now that the doorbell was beginning to ring, and any moment Jeremy and his Dorothy might come, she wondered with growing panic how she had ever had the courage to invite them.

She was grateful that when they did come it was Jean who let them in, so that she heard Jeremy's voice before she saw him, and had a minute in which to prepare herself.

Again and again had she speculated as to how she would feel, how they both would act when they stood face to face again. Now she was surprised at her own coolness. If she suffered in this moment, no one in this room, and least of all Jeremy Blaine, should know it.

"Jeremy!" she cried in a welcoming voice. "How well you look. How very nice to see you again!"

(How handsome he was! Dear God, how heartbreakingly handsome he was, and how young, and how gayly and impudently charming!)

The touch of his hand in greeting sent a quiver along her nerves. His smile, as he looked into her eyes, wrapped her in the old enchantment.

Jeremy. Her Jeremy! It wasn't true. It couldn't be true that they were standing thus, shaking hands like mere acquaintances, murmuring polite words as though on their last meeting they had not kissed and clung together.

It couldn't be true—but it was. It was the last three years that were the dream.

For Jeremy was introducing her to the small, slim, blond girl at his side. The blond girl was pretty in a childish fashion—pretty and spoiled and selfish, Felicia thought in the very moment she was greeting her.

"You and Dolly must be friends," Jeremy was saying gayly. "I know you'll like each other."

"I doubt it," Dolly's cool eyes said as she regarded Felicia with an appraising stare. But her voice was sweet as honey as she cooed:

"I'm so glad to meet you, Miss Collins. Jeremy has told me so much about you."

What had he told her? Felicia wondered with a creeping sense of sickness. How much of the sweet and intimate past had Jeremy confided to his promised wife?

"Aren't you going to present me to your friends?" Hugh's voice shattered the awkward moment.

He came and stood beside Felicia, and slipped his hand through her arm with the same casual, possessive gesture that Dolly had used with Jeremy. His attitude seemed to say he had a special right to be introduced first, and the cordiality with which he welcomed them was that of a host. Felicia saw the surprise in Jeremy's face.

"Oh, Hugh, you're such a darling, such a comfort. What would I do without you?"

"Hugh Lambert!" Dorothy repeated his name eagerly. "You're not related to Marjorie Lambert by any chance?"

"Why, yes, we're cousins."

"You don't say so!" Dorothy exclaimed, lifting long-lashed eyes to his in pretty provocation. "Why, Marge and I were the dearest friends at school. Do sit down here with me and tell me what she's doing these days, and where she is, and all about her."

"And you come here and talk to me, Felicia," Jeremy commanded, with his charming mixture of imperiousness and boyish appeal. "I want to hear all the home gossip."

BUT when he had her in a deep chair by the window, it was not of Fendwick affairs, but of his own that they spoke.

"Your fiancée is very pretty," Felicia began it, glancing across the room to where Dolly was flirting outrageously with Hugh.

"She isn't my fiancée," Jeremy corrected her. "That is, it's not been formally announced."

"But it will be?"

"In the fall some time," indifferently. "My uncle and her father are very keen about it."

"She's very pretty," Felicia repeated inanely.

"And you are simply gorgeous in that dress!" He brought the conversation back to a warm, personal note. "You—why, you take my breath away, Felicia. I didn't remember you as so beautiful."

"I wasn't when you saw me last," she answered with soft mockery, while a queer little smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. "A month of New York beauty shops can accomplish miracles, you know."

"You mean to say you've been here a whole month without seeing me?" he asked aggrievedly. "Do you call that a nice way to treat an old friend?"

"That's mostly my fault," Hugh's voice sounded close beside them. "I took advantage of Felicia's first lonesome days in New York to date her up for the next three months."

He smiled down at the girl with obvious tenderness, and held out his arms commandingly.

"Jean's turning on the radio," he said, "and this first dance is mine."

Deftly and coolly he took her away from Jeremy, and swept her into the rhythm of the fox trot.

"Hugh, you're a priceless darling," she murmured gratefully under cover of the music. "This is the second time you've helped me with your acting."

"Acting? What acting?"

"Ah, don't think I don't understand and appreciate what you're doing, Hugh. I know that Tommy asked you to be attentive to me in Fendwick, and I know you're keeping it up to-night. You've made things so easy for me! I'll be eternally grateful."

Hugh looked down at her very gravely.

"Perhaps you don't understand as much as you think you do, Felicia."

Something in his voice startled her. What could he mean? But before she had time to speculate, a hand touched Hugh's shoulder and a laughing, confident voice demanded, "May I cut in?"

Felicia yielded herself to Jeremy's arms with a feeling of reluctance. So many hundreds of times had they danced this way together, with his arm tightening about her waist, and her cheek so close to his shoulder. So many times had he bent his cheek till

it just brushed her hair and murmured softly, caressingly, as he did now, "We do dance well together, don't we, honey?"

The endearing word came so easily, so naturally, that Felicia's glance faltered, and the hot color poured into her cheeks.

"The party's going well, isn't it?" she asked him hurriedly. "Every one seems to be having a good time. Jean's a wonder at affairs like this."

"It's a good crowd," Jeremy agreed. "But I don't want to talk to you in a crowd. I can see we won't get a minute here. What day next week will you have lunch with me, Felicia?"

"Does Dorothy like your lunching with other girls?" she asked bluntly.

"Don't be small town," he answered with superior sophistication. "Dolly wouldn't let a little thing like an engagement cramp her style. She lunches and teas with a dozen beaus. She's probably making a date with your boy friend now."

Felicia followed his glance. Hugh and Dolly were dancing together. The girl's small blond head was tilted back, and her limpid eyes were challenging Hugh from between their silky lashes.

"She's just the sort of girl to be called Dolly." Felicia felt a quick stab of dislike. "Pink cheeks and yellow hair and sawdust stuffing! Well, evidently that's the sort that men prefer."

"I'll call you," Jeremy was saying, "and we'll make a date."

"All right," Felicia agreed indifferently, her mind still on the other couple. "If you're sure Dorothy won't scratch my eyes out."

"She won't; but what about the boy friend?"

"The boy friend?" Felicia asked, deliberately obtuse.

"The Lambert bimbo that Dolly's making eyes at. You're not engaged to him, are you?"

"No-o." Felicia drawled the word out hesitantly, delighted at the opportunity of ending her talk with Jeremy on this note. "No-o," she repeated demurely, uncertainly, and then turned to smile ravishingly at Bill Tucker, who had come to claim her for a dance.

THREE o'clock had struck before the party broke up, and the two girls, in kimonos and bedroom slippers, sat smoking a last cigarette and talking over the evening. Felicia was much too excited to sleep. Her eyes burned dark with emotion, and a smile that was half bitter, half triumphant, curved her lips.

"Thank Heaven, to-morrow — I mean to-day—is Sunday, and we can sleep all day."

"Didn't I hear Hugh speak about dropping in?"

"Not until evening. He and Bill said they'd bring in a steak and cook it for us. Hugh's such a dear."

"Your little yellow-haired friend evidently thought so," Jean said dryly. "She was making one dead set at Hugh all evening."

Felicia's face was carefully blank of expression.

"What did you think of Dorothy?" she asked.

"I think she's a cat, a yellow-haired pussycat, always greedy for the other kitty's saucer of cream."

"Jean, you're such a comfort!" Felicia laughed. "It's so nice to have you say all the nasty things about her that I don't dare to. No one can accuse *you* of being jealous!"

She got up restlessly and took a turn across the room.

"What a terrible blow to my

vanity!" she said. "To think that a little dim-wit with a baby stare could get Jeremy away from me."

"She was here, and you were not," Jean explained it. "Jeremy was seeing her several times a week, and you several times a year. When was the last time you'd seen him before you got his letter?"

"Christmas."

"H-m. Nearly six months, with Dolly making eyes at him, and her father and Jeremy's uncle doing everything to throw them together. It isn't hard to understand his falling."

"But he was engaged to me, and she knew it," Felicia protested.

"Of course she did. That was part of the fun. That sort of girl isn't interested in a man unless another girl wants him. That's why you needn't have any scruples about taking him away from her now. You know, Felicia, you handed Jeremy a terrible jolt to-night."

"You mean Hugh did by acting the devoted lover." Felicia dimpled irresistibly. "Did you see how beautifully he did it, Jean? You'd almost think he meant it."

"Yes," Jean agreed, with an odd note in her voice. "You almost would."

Later, when she was in bed and all the lights were out, Felicia kept remembering the grave look in Hugh's eyes when they had danced together.

She drifted off to sleep almost at once, thinking of Hugh—not of Jeremy at all!

"FELICIA, I've been such an awful fool!" The words were a groan on Jeremy's lips on an evening in October, three months later.

Felicia had come out of her office to find him restlessly pacing up and down.

"You're terribly late," he grumbled, quite as though they had had a definite appointment. She saw that there was haggardness in his handsome face, and that his eyes were harassed.

"Have dinner with me to-night," he demanded. "I want to talk."

"Sorry, but Hugh's coming."

"Hugh's always coming, it seems to me," Jeremy said explosively. "Call him off to-night, please, Felicia. I've *got* to talk to you!"

The trouble in his face, the appeal in his voice, softened Felicia's determination not to see him alone again.

"I can't break my date with Hugh," she said, "but I might call him up and postpone it for an hour. Come up to the apartment, if you like, and I'll give you a sandwich and a cup of tea."

They found the apartment dark and empty, with a note on the table from Jean, saying she was dining out with Bill. Felicia read the note and passed it over.

"Romance in the family!" she said delightedly. "After all Jean's swearing that she wouldn't marry the best man in the world, I really believe she's gone and fallen in love with old Bill. He's crazy about her, too."

"Jean's a good scout. But look here, Felicia, it's not Jean I want to talk about."

He hesitated a moment, running his fingers through his thick dark hair, and then blurted out impulsively, "Dorothy and her mother want to announce our engagement at once. They want the wedding at Christmas."

Felicia's expression took on a still composure. "Christmas is a lovely time to be married," she answered.

It was then that Jeremy dropped down into a chair, put his head in his hands, and groaned: "Felicia, I've been such an awful fool!"

She knew what he meant. After the last three months of growing attentiveness on Jeremy's part, she could not help but know. He was on the very edge of telling her all those things she had so longed to hear; that it was she he really loved, that his feeling for Dorothy had been only infatuation, and that more than anything in life he wanted back the love he had so carelessly thrown away.

Again and again in her first grief had Felicia dreamed that he would come back to her, loving and repentant, yet now she wanted desperately to keep him from speaking.

"I'm going to make you that tea," she said, getting hurriedly to her feet. "Will you have your sandwich toasted?"

But Jeremy was not to be diverted.

"Felicia," he begged, catching at her hand, "if I tell Dolly that I can't go through with it, will you take me back? It's you I love, you I've always loved."

Above the wild beating of her heart Felicia felt a crazy impulse toward laughter. It was so like Jeremy to make sure of one girl before he relinquished his hold on the other! He must have his cake and eat it, too.

"You love me like a friend, a playmate, Jeremy," she quoted the words of that cruel letter he once had written her. "Ours was just a silly boy-and-girl affair."

"I was a fool to say that," Jeremy groaned again. "I must have been crazy."

"No, you were quite right," she interrupted. "It *was* a boy-and-girl affair, and better ended."

"Felicia!" he implored her. "Don't talk that way. Please, please, don't ruin both our lives. Let me explain; let me make you understand."

"I understand now, Jeremy."

"I was here, alone in New York," he went on beseechingly, "and you were so far away. And I was lonesome—oh, I'm not trying to excuse myself, only to make you see."

Compassion awoke in her, and with it wonder that this weak youth had ever had the power to stir her. It seemed incredible that his surface charm had ever blinded her to his shallowness.

"I see perfectly, Jeremy," she assured him gently. "You were lonesome, and Dolly was pretty, and her family and yours were both keen for the match."

"They want to keep the business in the family," Jeremy agreed. "Uncle Dick—well, I guess I can say good-by to my job and all my prospects if I don't marry Dolly now."

"That would be too bad," she replied. "Is any woman worth it?"

"You are," he answered warmly, not perceiving her mockery. "You're worth anything! I'm crazy about you, Felicia—more than I ever was before. It's been horrible to feel you were avoiding me."

"I have avoided you, Jeremy," she told him then, "deliberately. I wanted to keep you from doing this very thing."

"Felicia," he begged, "you said you understood."

"I do understand," she said sadly. "I've even forgiven you. But something is gone. You killed something in me that can't be brought back to life."

"I was a beast," he said miserably. "A cruel, thoughtless, despicable beast, but—"

"You were all of that," she agreed quietly, "but that's no longer important. I can almost thank you now, for

if it hadn't been for you I'd never have come to New York and found the work I love, and Jean, and—Hugh—"

"Hugh!" Jeremy caught the name up resentfully. "It's he who has changed you, made you like this!"

"Hugh was my friend when I needed one badly," Felicia reminded him. "When you had thrown me over and left me to face the sneers and gossip."

"I didn't realize, I never dreamed—"

"No," she said, "and you don't realize even now what you're doing, Jeremy."

"I'm telling you I love you! I'm begging you to marry me!"

"How can you do that when you're engaged to Dorothy?"

"But I tell you that if you—"

"If I consent, then you'll break your engagement to her as cruelly as you did yours to me," she told him scornfully. "But if I don't consent, why then you'll marry her—isn't that the idea, Jeremy? Well, go right ahead. I won't stop you. Dorothy is welcome to you. However, I hope we'll still be friends."

SHE could not resist that last phrase. It was one of the things that had hurt her so in his letter—that he could expect her, who once had had his love, to be content with friendship.

But when she saw the hurt in his face, and the pain in his eyes, she was sorry for her bitterness. He was such a boy, so immature. He had no more understanding of the unforgivable things he did than a child would have.

"I'm sorry, Jeremy," she told him in a gentler tone, "but it's no use. I don't love you."

"You loved me once. I could teach you to love me again!"

Impetuously he crossed to her, and tried to put his arms around her, but with a cold and quiet dignity she repulsed him.

"Don't do that, unless you want me to hate you."

Amazed and bewildered, he looked down at her, and she saw that he still could not believe that she meant it.

Felicia herself did not understand how she had grown so far away. Why, only as recently as the night of the party, she had wanted to win him back again, and in the days that immediately followed, she had been radiant with the hope that she had done so.

Yet now she was only *sorry* for Jeremy; sorry for him and for Dolly.

"You do love me—you must love me," he was repeating doggedly. "It's only your pride that's making you refuse me—your desire to get back at me for—"

"Don't say it, Jeremy; it isn't true. I don't love you—and I know you don't love me. Not really. A month from now you'll be all over this, and by Christmas you'll be happily married to Dorothy."

"I'll not marry her at all. I'll go to her now, to-night, and break off everything! Then I'll come back to you, a free man."

"It's no use, Jeremy—can't you understand? I'm not jealous of Dolly. Even if there were no such person in the world I still wouldn't marry you."

"Then there's some one else," he told her. "There's another man."

Felicia's head lifted proudly.

"That's something you've no right to ask me."

"If it's Hugh Lambert," he said furiously, "don't fool yourself that he'll ever marry you. A man of his class may play around with working girls, but when it comes to marriage—"

"A man of his class?" Felicia interrupted sharply. "Just what do you mean?"

"Oh, don't play Little Miss Innocence with me," Jeremy said, seizing on the chance to be vindictive. "Every one knows Hugh Lambert's a wealthy man."

"Every one doesn't know, because *I* don't know it!" she cried.

"Tell that to the Marines! You've been blaming me for letting Dolly's money influence me, and then you throw yourself at the head of the first rich man—"

Jeremy broke off, startled by the cold, white fury in Felicia's face.

She crossed over to the door and held it open.

"Get out of here," she said. "Get out and stay out, before I call the janitor and have you thrown out!"

NEVER in all her life had she been so angry. Her voice shook; her eyes were blinded by tears of rage.

But Jeremy saw the man who stood in the hall, recognized him.

"Ah, Lambert," he said with a deep ironic bow, "you arrive in the nick of time!"

Hugh's eyes went from Jeremy's mocking face to Felicia's white one.

"What is it?" he asked quietly. "What has happened?"

"Why, nothing, nothing at all," Jeremy answered on a high hysterical note, "except that I've been given my walking papers. I'm to get out of here, and make way for my successor. Permit me to congratulate you, Lambert. The lady loves you for yourself alone—or so she says! Your money doesn't make the slightest bit of difference! Of course, it never does—"

Hugh's hand doubled into a fist, and he took a threatening step toward the overwrought and sneering Jeremy, but instantly Felicia threw herself between them.

"Don't hit him, Hugh!" she begged. "He doesn't know what he's saying nor what he's doing. Just make him go away."

"You heard what Felicia said," Hugh menaced him. "Now take your hat and get out of here! And don't ever let me see you here again!"

Jeremy went. The door closed behind him with a crash that echoed through the house, and Felicia's overwrought nerves broke suddenly.

Sinking down into a chair, she buried her head in her arms and sobbed like a hurt, tired child.

Instantly Hugh was on his knees beside her, and his arms went round her in a compelling clasp.

"My dear, my dear, my little love," he cried. "Oh, Felicia! Felicia!"

It was heaven to be cradled so against his shoulder, to feel the secure strength of his arms, holding her close, to hear his warm voice murmuring all the sweet, endearing phrases that only lovers know.

He did not try to stop her tears, but let her weep away all the hurt of Jeremy's words.

"It wasn't true what he said, Hugh," she told him pitifully, raising earnest, tear-wet eyes at last. "I didn't know you're rich, and if I had it wouldn't have made any difference."

"Don't I know that, darling? Don't I know your fineness, and your honesty, and courage better than any one else could know them? The money doesn't matter—nothing matters except that you *do* love me. Oh, say it, sweetheart; let me hear you say it!"

She turned until her lips were close to his.

"I love you, Hugh," she murmured shyly. "I love you with all my heart and soul."

It was a long while before they could take time from their kisses and embraces to talk of Jeremy.

"Poor devil, I'm sorry for him in a way," Hugh said. "It must be horrible to realize that you've had the most wonderful thing in the world in your grasp and have thrown it away. He was hard hit to-night."

"I blame myself for that scene," Felicia said slowly. "It's true that lately I've been avoiding him, but there was a time when I was flirting with him and trying to win him back again."

"I knew you were, my dear. I had to stand by and see you doing it."

"Oh, Hugh, why did you let me? Why didn't you stop me?"

"Because I knew that nothing could set you really free of Jeremy Blaine except finding out once and for all that you didn't want him. So long as you thought of yourself as jilted by him, he symbolized to you the thing you wanted and could not get. But now—"

"Now I see that his jilting me was the luckiest break I've ever had," she interrupted him adoringly. "Oh, Hugh darling, suppose he hadn't done it! I'd never have found you then. I'd have missed the most wonderful thing in life."

"That couldn't have happened," Hugh told her ardently. "It's written in the stars that you and I shall marry and be happy ever after. From the beginning of time we were meant for each other."

"From the beginning of time," she repeated on a soft breath.

Her blue eyes burned dark with happiness; her soft cheeks flushed, and her lips curved on a smile of wondering delight.

Hugh caught her closer with a little cry.

"Felicia, you're so beautiful, so wonderful! Oh, darling, I love you, love you!"

Lost in the joy of lips that met and clung, and hearts that beat to the same wild, sweet rhythm, neither of them knew when the key turned in the lock and Jean stood arrested in the doorway.

Jean's smile was very tender as she looked at them, then softly she closed the door again and turned to Bill Tucker, behind her in the shadowy hall.

"It's Hugh and Felicia," she explained. "They're telling each other they're the happiest people in the world."

"They're wrong, at that," Bill said triumphantly. "For *we're* the happiest, aren't we, honey?"

Jean did not answer in words. But when she lifted her arms and drew his face down close to hers, he had no doubt that she agreed.

Gifts

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

WHILE Wise Men humbly kneel amid the straw
With gifts of gold and silk and fragrant myrrh,
Where startled cattle stare in breathless awe,
And velvet-footed shadows softly stir;
While Shepherds in adoring bow them down
Above their gifts of honey, wool and wheat,
Where starry music thrills the Holy Town,
Until the night grows mystically sweet;
Dear lass, we steal into the lowly shed,
We tiptoe to the manger wonder-eyed,
And lo, where angels hear our trembling tread,
Together, hand-in-hand, love-glorified,
We lean to Mary and the Seraphs sing,
As we give Christ our hearts of worshiping!

"Oh, yes, when I went to Paris I was a hick like the rest of you," said Mignon airily. "Just plain Minnie! And look at me now!"

Her Rival From Paris

By EVAN SANDS

ALL night she lay awake listening to the ticking of the clock. "Dick! Dick! Dick!" the clock was saying. And "Dick! Dick! Dick!" her heart was calling, and in the stillness it sounded so loud that Helen feared Mignon, sleeping with such apparent innocence beside her, would hear and awake.

For it was all Mignon's fault, but Helen would rather die than have her know. Mignon was her guest, and she had learned well the lesson of hospitality. Now, as she tried to muffle from her ears the ominous ticking of the clock she resolved that never, never, should her friend guess that she had stolen from Helen the one precious thing in her life.

For months she had planned this week-end, looked forward to it, saved her pin money for it—Minnie's welcome home. But then nobody in Claireville had expected Mignon; not until she had hopped off the train and exhibited herself to the amazed "folks back home" in all her sophisticated simplicity, did any one realize that Minnie was no more. Two years ago she had gone to France a simple Claireville girl, and now she had come home, a dashing, smart—startlingly different person—Mignon!

The moment Dick let his brown eyes meet Mignon's green ones something had happened. Helen imagined she almost saw a flash leap in the air between them. And when Mignon looked up again from under her severe but, oh, so smart, sailor hat there was a

tiny challenge in the clear green eyes and a small wise smile on her lush red lips. She knew.

All that first evening Dick had been thoughtful, sort of absent-minded; twice he had not answered when Helen spoke to him. But he followed Mignon's supple, green-clad form with his eyes, and his ears were ever alert for anything, any word she might say.

"Now, in Paris," said Mignon to Dick, "they dance it this way."

She put her round arm about his neck, letting her smooth fingers caress the back of his head, and she slid her graceful form close to him. Her lips were very near, and from her slick black hair there emanated a delicate perfume.

"This way," she cooed. And then—it happened. There, before every one, suddenly Dick closed in on the hair's breadth between them and kissed her.

Helen gasped and turned white, but before she could apologize Mignon was saying, between giggles, "And you'd make a perfect Frenchman, Dick, really perfect, I mean."

Of course, no one said anything. But Helen knew something was wrong. Claireville boys are much like any other boys: they flirted and they petted—if you let them. But Dick! Why, Dick was the steadiest boy in town, sober and serious and dependable. Indeed that had even been the fly in the ointment. She often had felt that with him she was just missing romance. He would never do anything venturesome nor improper! He was almost reverent with her, and now, when she thought how she had longed to be swept off her feet, she bit her lip. Could this be her Dick? This tall, glowing-eyed man who made a public exhibition of his vanquishment by Mignon?

And could this be plain Minnie, for whom she had planned the week-end out of charity? Minnie had been a sallow-skinned, ungainly youngster when she went away. And now—Helen remembered the Egyptian girls on the vases she had seen in the New York museum. Mignon could have been the model, with her straight-banged black hair and her sleek head and her pomegranate golden skin. She used no rouge; only her lips were smooth scarlet and her almond-green eyes were ever so slightly penciled. Her clothes were severe—French tailored—allowing free range for every subtle curve of her small body. Cleopatra, 1930 model. What chance had Helen?

"HOW did you ever do it?" asked Helen that night.

Mignon, curled on the bed, pyjama-clad, drew a black satin leg beneath her and murmured, "Whaat?"

"Get this way? Why, Minnie—I mean Mignon—when you left Claireville you were—like the rest of us. Of course we expected that after two years abroad you'd be changed somewhat. But—but, you're so entirely different. No one would know you, I mean." And Helen's lovely face was suffused with blushes.

Mignon laughed.

"You mean, I'm not a hick any longer? Well, thank Heaven, no. But it wasn't an overnight transformation, Helen, I can tell you—and it wasn't so easy. When I came to L'Ecole Sainte Marie I was *gauche*—I couldn't walk nor talk. And dress! Why, Helen, you're Peggy Joyce compared to me. I was just plain Minnie. And didn't I know it? And then—they put me into a room with Dolores. Dolores—well, she's the daughter of one of the most beautiful and notorious women in

France. None of the girls who had mothers were allowed to room with her. And that's why I'm no longer plain Minnie. Do you see?"

"No," said Helen.

"Well, Dolores hadn't ever had a real friend. She got quite attached to me. She used to give me little things at first to fix up my dresses—she was quite an artist in her way. She took me in hand. When vacations came I'd have no place to go and there wasn't much fun for her with her mother, who didn't like such a big daughter hanging around, so she'd invite me to go with her. Oh, the fun we had at Nice and Monte Carlo and Deauville—and the things we saw!"

Helen gasped. "You mean you've seen all those places? And you've stayed with actresses?"

"And how!" laughed Mignon. "And after all, here I am back at Claireville—the old home town."

"It must be awfully dull for you. But I do hope you'll have a nice time, Mignon." Helen sighed and her blue eyes blurred as she thought of her own drab lot. How could she blame Dick? Suppose some man as fascinating as Mignon suddenly came into her life, would she react differently? And yet her heart ached. "Mignon, what do you think of Dick?" she asked suddenly.

"Dick?" Mignon yawned. "A simple lad. But he'll do as well as any to while away the time."

Helen's sensitive chin quivered. How could she! To take Dick away just for a lark. But then, how could Mignon know about him?

"Oh, I thought you liked him," said she.

Mignon laughed. "Not quite the type, Helen, not quite! Listen. Shall I tell you about the man I could care for? Did you ever see eyes that changed with moods? When he's glad they're golden and warm as the sun, and when he's angry they're gray and as cold as steel. He's tall and lean, not thin, but with that tautness that comes from outdoor life—you can just see his muscles glistening under his bronze skin. He has the whitest teeth and the warmest smile of any man in the world and the wittiest tongue. He doesn't smile often, but when he does! It's divine! I met him at Cannes and again at Monte Carlo. Of course, he hardly noticed me because of the competition. The women are mad about him—and his money. But—and this is the strangest thing—he's an American, and he owns a tract of land just out of Claireville and he's supposed to be here soon. And that's really—" Mignon bit her lip and stopped, vexed with herself. She had said too much. But Helen was too spellbound to notice. Was there such a man? And Mignon knew him? Everything wonderful happened to Mignon. Then why shouldn't she leave Helen her simple Dick?

And so she lay awake all night listening to the clock ticking, "Dick! Dick!"

THE morning came with a bang. It was so sultry and hot one felt that an explosion was imminent, yet the sky was clear.

They were eight at breakfast: the three boys, Helen, Mignon, and rosy-cheeked Claire, and aunts Mary and Bea. Helen's eyes were tired, but she kept up a constant merry flow of chatter, always the perfect hostess. Her dress was lavender; Mignon wore a white sleeveless frock piped with green, and dainty green linen slippers.

"How about a jaunt up the river?"

Dick suggested, his eyes imploring Mignon. Every one waited for her answer.

"Oh, ducky!" she exclaimed. "Let's."

"And shall we take lunch and make it a picnic?" asked Helen.

There was a chorus of assent.

While the others went out on the porch, Helen stayed behind with aunts Mary and Bea to prepare the lunch.

"Helen," said Aunt Mary, "Dick's a nice young man. I've always thought so."

The girl studied the bread she was slicing; and waited.

"Dick is a very nice young man," Aunt Mary repeated, "but a young man who—Helen, dear, do you think he is flirting with Mignon?"

Helen flushed. "I don't know, I'm sure, Aunt Mary."

"Dearie, I believe you'd best wear your blue silk this morning. It's most becoming. And your picture hat."

"Oh, Aunt Mary, not for a trip up the river! I couldn't! Besides, no one is changing."

So Aunt Mary thought she was losing him! Helen wrapped the dainty chicken sandwiches, took the pickles off the shelf, cut the portions of Bea's delicious cake, and wondered. If only she knew a few of Mignon's French tricks. But she was guileless—one glance at her sweet, Madonnalike face would convince anybody she was no vamp.

She found them on the porch.

"Ready," she called.

They started out. Down the road Helen found she was walking with Dick and Mignon, who were engrossed in each other.

"Two is company," Helen said with a sad little laugh. "May I walk with you, Don?"

Don rushed up, glad of the opportunity to walk with her, but she imagined that even he was not so anxious as usual. More than once he cast a speculative eye toward Mignon.

"Isn't she lovely?" queried Helen suddenly, hoping perhaps that he might not agree.

"Hmm. Yes. Sort of a burn-up-my-clothes woman, though. Not a bit like you, Helen."

"No," said Helen hopelessly. "I'm not a bit like her."

The canoe was anchored in the cove, its long red body glistening in the sun. They had christened it Firefly, and now in the heat there was a phosphorescent quality about its graceful length.

"Pile in everybody," called Dick. "Easy now. This is no uncollapsible canoe. Here, Don, take the front paddle. I'll steer. Mignon, you get back here. There you are. All right?"

Don at the front; Claire and Bill on the seats; Mignon propped up against Dick in the stern of the canoe—and Helen on the floor all alone with a lunch basket. What a party—for Helen. And Dick! What could every one be thinking? The party wasn't going to be much fun. It was too hot, anyway. All the lovely chocolate must be melting on the cake. Of course, she couldn't blame Mignon. Mignon didn't know that Dick and she had been sweethearts for years. "Dearest, dearest!" Helen kept hearing his voice. Only Thursday he had been saying that to her, and here it was Saturday, and he didn't even know that she was in the boat with him.

"Sing some French songs, Mignon," Claire asked.

"Do," echoed Helen, not caring at all.

Mignon did. She had a small, husky

voice with a good deal of throb in it—sexy. The three boys gave her rapt attention.

"Some crooner," whispered Dick, and he closed his brown eyes as if to listen better.

Don let his paddle slide and sat back in the boat dreamily. Everybody was intent on golden Mignon and her song—that is, everybody but Helen, who was too miserable to listen. Then, suddenly, a hundred feet away, parallel with the canoe, a white motor-boat cut through the water at tremendous speed.

"Quick!" shrieked Helen, who knew the ways of canoes. "Turn the boat!"

The swells were coming now. They were big ones, white-capped, and they caught the little boat and rocked it as if it had been a leaf. They were getting bigger and bigger. Still, if Dick hadn't leaned over so far to dip his paddle and if Mignon had not suddenly turned panicky and grabbed his arm, it might have been all right. But the sudden movement unbalanced the boat and in two seconds three boys, three dainty girls and a lunch basket were precipitated into the river.

HELEN'S first thought was one of relief. It was cool in the water, and once she had kicked off her slippers her clothes did not hamper her much. She could swim a little, and she knew that the thing to do was to grab and hang on to the canoe. But what about the others? Mignon, between mouthfuls of water, was shrieking. She was clinging to Dick's neck with a stranglehold. The others were more cool-headed. Already Bill and Claire were hanging on to the canoe and Don was at the stern, towing in Dick's direction.

"Quick, help me, Bill!" he cried. "Before she pulls him down! Lend a hand there."

Bill did so, and just as the water was about to close over Dick's head Don caught him and pulled him, with Mignon still attached, up to the boat. Helen, just about out of breath, caught up to them and clung to the boat, sputtering.

Nobody had missed her, apparently. She had been left to take care of herself. Although Dick knew she wasn't much of a swimmer, his first thought had been for Mignon.

"Hang on, everybody," commanded Don. "Bill, take the back of the boat and I'll tow and let's see if we can't make the shore."

The boys were strong swimmers, and in about half an hour the capsized canoe and the six survivors reached the little cove, where the boat was moored.

"Ugh, what an experience!" said Mignon, shivering, as Dick pulled her up on the bank.

"Are you all right?" he asked anxiously. "Sure you're all right?"

"Quite," she laughed. "But how about the others? I'm not the only girl here, am I? How about Helen and Claire?"

"Oh, I'm all right," murmured Helen.

That evening, in her room as they dressed for the big party, Helen said to Mignon: "Dick seems quite mad about you."

Mignon tossed her head. "Does he? Well, he'll get over it, Helen. They all do. Meanwhile, can't I enjoy myself until Mr. Dream Man puts in an appearance?"

"Oh, yes, by all means. Do enjoy yourself."

Poor Dick! So she was just making game of him. But, of course, she didn't

dream that he was hers, Helen's, and how could she tell her now?

She took out the dress that she had treasured for this occasion. Cousin Sally had sent it from New York. It was really lovely and she never would have spent all the money she had, but she had thought that perhaps, to-night, she and Dick would announce their engagement. Of course, it was Mignon's party, but she did not think Mignon would mind her stealing away some of the importance if she announced it at the very end of the party. But that was impossible now; things would never be the same again for her and Dick.

Suddenly the door was opened and the girl, disheveled, drenched, shivering, stumbled into the room

She held the delicate blue chiffon of the dress against her cheek and wondered whether she should wear it at all.

"Helen, what a beauty!" gasped Mignon. "You never got that in Claireville."

"No. It's Fifth Avenue."

"It's lovely, and it just suits you. My dear, I shouldn't want you around to-night if any big shots were here. You look simply too divine."

Helen regarded her lovely image in the mirror. For all its cool demureness, the frock was revealing. It made her look like an exquisite blond fairy, and her eyes took on the exact tone of the dress and looked like delicate blue flowers, rain-drenched. Her soft golden hair was coiled low on her neck and a double strand of seed pearls, which had been her mother's, caressed her throat.

Mignon had donned a black and silver chiffon, very low, very daring—and very worldly. She carried a long black-tipped silver cigarette holder, and as she stood beside Helen they were a study in contrasts.

"You do look stunning, Mignon," whispered Helen, "and I hope you enjoy the party."

Every one "Oh'd" and "Ah'd" when the two girls came down.

"How lovely, Helen!"

"How simply divine, Mignon!"

"Isn't Helen exquisite?"

"Isn't Mignon stunning?"

The honors were even, but Dick, seeing the fair vision and the dark, rushed toward Mignon and with hardly a glance at the other carried her off.

"Will you dance with me?" asked Don, tucking Helen's trembling hand under his arm.

"Oh, Don," she murmured, "you're sorry for me. You mustn't be."

"Sorry for you? Why any one need be sorry for a ravishing vision like you I fail to see. If it's Mignon that's worrying you, stop right now, because any man who's been around at all would trade three of her for one of you, darling. Dick's just a boy who's having his attack of the measles."

"Dear Don!" Helen whispered, and wished that she could care for him. How *safe* a girl would be with him!

HELEN danced every dance. Of course; she always did. There was Don and Bill and Harry, Cousin Ned, home from college. But no Dick. That was too awful. He might have asked her for one dance, just to keep people from talking. And where was he? He and Mignon had disappeared.

It was stifling in the room, and she grew dizzy.

"Don, shall we go out?" she asked. They were dancing together for the third time. "I'm frightfully warm. Can't we cool off somewhere?"

"Surest thing, honey. Tell you what—you go out on the porch and I'll bring some ices. Meet you there in two minutes." And he swung her toward the wide French doors.

Out on the porch it was still hot; the air was lifeless. There was something ominous and oppressive about the night. Suddenly, Helen heard voices, and involuntarily held her breath. Right below the porch, in the old swing, were Mignon and Dick. He was holding her in his arms, and the listening girl could hear his hoarse whisper:

"Mignon, darling, I'm just mad about you, crazy—do you hear? There's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you. I never knew what it was to care for anybody before. But you've gone to my head—like champagne, I guess. Mignon, tell me that you love me!"

And then Helen heard another voice,

soft, calculating, catlike. "What about Helen, Dick? Claire told me that you two were practically engaged."

"Helen? Oh, that was just a kid affair. Why, Mignon, darling, you don't think I care a darn about her, do you? She's only a baby—what does she know about love? Honey, you don't think I could kiss her like this, do you?"

For a moment there was a meaning silence, then—

"Dicky-boy, do you know, Helen is just a sainted hick. That's what she is. She's a lovely girl, but she simply hasn't any sex appeal."

Mignon snuggled closer to Dick, so that the two shadows became one.

"Of course, darling. And who wants a sainted little hick, anyhow? Not when he can hold a real honest-to-goodness red-blooded woman in his arms, beautiful, like this."

There was a little giggle and sounds of a struggle, but Helen didn't wait to hear more. The world was spinning round her. Cold shivers ran up and down her spine, and then a sudden wild impulse took possession of her. She must run away—anywhere, but she couldn't go back to the party. She couldn't face people and smile while those two, her friend and her old lover, were laughing at her, calling her "sainted little hick." What did they know about her? What did Dick know? He hadn't ever really thrilled her with his half-hearted lovemaking, anyway. But now she was hurt—hurt! She had tried so hard to be a good sport and not to spoil Mignon's party, even if it meant losing her man. But she hadn't thought Mignon knew, all the time.

She sped up the road and turned off at a little crossroad. It was pitch black outside; there was no moon, and the sky seemed very low. That was because of the thick clouds, of course, but the stricken girl felt that the sky was just reaching down to crush her. Every one had turned against her: Dick, Mignon, even the night. It was horrible out, somehow. Frenzied with fear and humiliation, she ran on, stumbling in her high-heeled slippers. Suddenly she found she had lost the road in the darkness. She was walking across a field.

There came a clap of thunder and the flash of lightning lit up the wild scene. Helen's heart shook. A storm! She was out alone in a storm. But what did it matter? Who cared? What had she to live for? Still, she hastened her steps. The rain commenced to fall in large drops, warm and big as nickels, faster and faster. Hardly a moment, and she was drenched. But the rain was cool on her flushed cheeks, and in the midst of her fear she had a sense of exultation.

More thunder and more lightning! She ran toward a clump of trees, trying to remember what she had learned in school about trees in a thunderstorm. A forest was all right, but a single tree was dangerous. Wasn't that it? She fell and bruised her knees. It was raining in earnest now; she was beginning to be cold. She pushed through the trees aimlessly, and then—crash!—the heavens seemed to burst, and not a hundred feet away a tree burst into flames with a dry, crackling, horrible sound. The air was lit up and suddenly—could it be?—yes, almost completely hidden in foliage, she spied a little, rough log cabin. Shelter!

SOBBING, she threw her light weight against the door. It was bolted. Helen smote the door again and again with her bleeding

fist. She was faint now, and she felt that in another moment she would let go and slip into blessed unconsciousness, when suddenly the door was unbolted from within.

She heard the bark of a dog and a deep voice commanding, "Down, Pete!" The next thing she knew she was propped before the fireplace in a big chair and a man was saying, "Here, drink this," and forcing some bitter liquid between her teeth. She lay back and closed her eyes. In a very few moments she began to feel warm inside —warm and comfy—and she opened her blue eyes and found herself looking into a pair of golden-brown ones. She didn't know whether it was the liqueur or not, but something in her seemed to snap; little warm currents of delight flowed through her body.

"Poor half-drowned little fairy, who ever turned you out on a night like this?" asked a velvet voice. "But wait, you're soaked! Get out of those clothes before you begin to talk."

Helen looked around her. She was in the living room—in fact, the only room of a small cabin. Bright and cheerful it was, indeed, with a huge fireplace, fur skins on the floor and a big couch, but where did he expect her to change her clothes? There wasn't even a screen.

As if he read her thoughts, he went on: "Right here, child, before the fire. Pete and I are both gentlemen. We'll turn our backs, won't we, Pete?" he addressed the big Airedale. "And when you've taken off your wet things, get into this." He brought her a large brown blanket robe.

Helen did as she was bidden.

"Ready," she called when she was settled back in the chair wrapped in the robe up to her delicate pointed chin. Her golden hair had come down and was cascading over her shoulders; before the dry heat of the fire it curled and crinkled and waved. She held her naked little pink toes close to the flames, looking down at them and rejoicing that her feet were pretty, slim and elfin and quite flawless.

"What a picture you are," said the big, brown-skinned man. "Do you know, I almost believe there are fairies in this wood?"

"Tired fairies."

"You poor little kid! Now tell me what brought you out in this storm. Perhaps I can help, and if I can—" He smiled, and Helen imagined she heard Mignon's voice saying, "He doesn't smile often. But when he does —it's divine."

Suddenly she wanted to tell him—everything. It would be so good to unburden her heart; she knew he would understand. There was something so utterly kind and gentle and human about his big brownness.

"Will you promise not to laugh at me and never to tell?" she asked.

"Do I have to *promise* such a thing?"

She raised her head and looked into his eyes. "Of course you don't," she said. "Forgive me."

And she told him—all about Mignon, and Dick, and the week-end party, and the wretched conversation she had overheard.

When she had finished he cried out, and his eyes were like steel—no longer golden, but sharp, cold, gray—"I'd like to wring his neck, the young fool! And you say he preferred Mignon to you? Well, never mind, you sporting young thing, he shows poor taste indeed, and you've lost nothing."

"Indeed I haven't," answered Helen, and realized suddenly that she meant it. Something had come over her. She

could feel the blood pounding in her temples, and the whole room was swimming about her. But she didn't mind it—no, she liked it. The man was sitting quite close to her, and his eyes had gone golden again, and she noticed how a little pulse kept beating along the strong line of his throat.

He took her slim hand in his large one, and then—how it happened, neither of them knew—his strong mouth was on hers, and she felt herself responding to his kiss as she had never answered a kiss before.

"Little white flower," he whispered. "Oh, my beautiful!"

A MOMENT later he pushed her roughly away from him, strode to the door, threw it open, and stood there taking in deep breaths of the night air. The thunder had ceased, but the rain poured down steadily, silver sheet after silver sheet, promising to continue for the night.

"I'm sorry," he said, turning to her.

"Sorry?" she repeated, puzzled.

"Please understand, little one. You are under my roof to-night. You've come to me out of the storm, and I must respect your need. I didn't mean to kiss you. I wanted to, of course—who could help that? But I shouldn't have done it."

"Don't be sorry," Helen said softly. "For I am not. I know now that I never did love Dick."

"You darling, it is sweet of you to say so. But I shall behave myself for the rest of this night, nevertheless."

Helen was almost sorry. That kiss, she knew, had not been casual—it was too sweet, too real.

Here was a man to dream about.

"You must be tired. Let me fix the couch for you so you can go to sleep. I'll lie down on this rug at your feet, my lady. Pete and I will stand guard." And he made obeisance to her as if she had been a queen.

Helen watched him arrange the fur rugs and blankets on the bed and her heart was filled with a warm, sweet pain. If only this were some dream from which she might never waken! If only the morning would not come! The rain pattered insistently on the roof, and its tap, tap, tap only made the room more snug.

He lifted her off the chair effortlessly and placed her on the couch. She closed her eyes and held her breath. But he did not kiss her. He wrapped the blankets tightly about her and placed a pillow under the yellow-gold head and all he said was "Comfy?"

"So comfy," she murmured.

"Then go to sleep, little flower, for you've had a hard day and to-morrow there'll be some tall explaining to do at home."

To-morrow! Explanations! What did she care for to-morrow? To-night was heaven and she wanted to prolong it forever.

"Good night, fair lady," he whispered, and he brushed her trembling hand with his lips. "Say good night, Pete."

"Bow," said Pete.

"Good night," whispered Helen. "Good night, enchanted prince."

She was so tired. She wanted to stay awake and enjoy every minute. But she was so tired. She fell asleep like a child, deeply, wonderfully, blessedly asleep.

SHE awoke with a start. What had happened? Where was she? Everything seemed strange. Who was this man lying on the rug at her feet? The gray light of dawn crept through the chinks in the log walls,

silvering the dimness of the room. Suddenly she remembered. It was not a dream. This was he, the man whom she must ove, and perhaps hopelessly, for the rest of her life. It was inevitable. And yet to have had that one night, to have known, so wonderfully, his tenderness, his kindness, his protection—was it not enough?

What must they be thinking at home? It was quiet now; the rain had stopped. They would be looking for her. Suppose they found her here? What would they think, and do? She would be compromised—and what would they expect of him? It was too terrible. She must not hurt him so.

She sprang from the couch and hastily donned her clothes, which were dry now on the chair before the fire. She must go away. And she didn't even know his name, nor he hers. How would they ever meet again? Perhaps when he awoke and found her gone without a word he would think her ungrateful.

"Good-by," she whispered. "Good-by, my dear!" And she kissed the brown, rumpled hair ever so lightly.

Outside it was the freshest of mornings. Summer after the storm, the year rejuvenated. Helen cut across the fields and walked until she came to a little road.

"Is this the path?" she thought and chanced it. She followed it for a mile and turned a bend, and sure enough here was the high road. Almost home.

The face of all the world had changed since she had gone so brokenly along that very path the night before. And now she was so happy; it was as if a fountain of joy bubbled in her heart. Even if she never saw him again—but, no, somehow, she knew that could not happen.

Stealthily she crept up the back stairs and stole into her own room. Mignon was sitting in the rocker trying to read. She started when her friend came in.

"Helen," she cried. "Where were you? Every one's been looking for you and we were just scared to death. Don and Dick are still out. Oh, where were you, Helen?"

"Out," answered Helen, "and I'm tired, Mignon—I want to sleep."

"What on earth have you done to your dress? It's positively ruined! Have you been tramping about in the rain all night?"

"I've been having a very good time, Mignon."

Helen felt very bold and carefree, but she was fatigued, too, and she threw herself into her own comfortable bed joyfully. "I could sleep forever," she cried. "Sleep and dream!"

And she did, all morning. She dreamed of a tall, brown-skinned man with a very white smile and golden eyes. He was holding her in his arms and he was just about to kiss her again when—

"Helen, Helen!" a voice called. "Wake up! Wake up! Something wonderful's happened."

It was Mignon.

"What is it?" asked Helen, sitting up in bed and stretching her slim white arms.

"It's Paul—Paul Dervish! Oh, Helen, you do remember the wonderful man I told you about? Well, he's here in town. He's telephoned me and he's coming to see me. Oh, Helen, you must get up. You must help me! Darling, do get up—slip on anything and go down and tell him to wait. Then come up and help me dress. I must look my beautifulest. It's so important—everything depends on it. You see, I wrote him that I was com-

ing here. But I didn't think he'd bother. But, oh, Helen, you must help me!"

Helen sat up startled, almost shocked. Could this be cool, sophisticated, worldly Mignon, who took what she wanted so carelessly? Who never lost her poise? Well, Helen could afford to be generous this morning; she would even help her land her rich man. What did she care for riches, when she could dream of those golden eyes, that smile, that velvet voice?

She got out of bed and slipped into a little white linen dress, simple, cool, and taking two years at least from her young appearance.

"You look like a beautiful baby," said Mignon, ingratiatingly. "I never saw your eyes so blue. Do hurry right back, Helen."

Helen went down to the big, cool, hospitable living room. A man was sitting in the corner where the light was dimmest, half hidden by a huge rubber plant.

"How do you do, Mr. Dervish?" she began. "I'm Helen Fielding—Mignon asked me to tell you to wait."

"How do you do, Helen Fielding?" a familiar voice replied. "Tell Mignon she needn't hurry, my own sweet Helen."

Her friend of the little log cabin was getting to his feet before her. *He* was Paul Dervish, and he had come to her, not to Mignon.

"MUST I explain, darling?" he whispered, taking her into his arms. "Well, then, when you told me your little story last night I recognized Mignon, and as I didn't want to lose you I called here this morning and she told me—unconsciously, of course—where to find you. So here I am. And now, dear, dear little Helen, tell me that you're glad I've found you."

"Glad? Why, Paul, I love you! That was why I ran away this morning. I didn't want them to find us together and to compromise you. I wanted you to come to me of your own accord."

"Darling, you make me so happy. I want to hear you say it over and over, 'I love you.' Because *I* love *you*, dear, so madly, wonderfully, that my whole life seems to have started all over again."

He caught her to him and covered her face with kisses. "These are for the ones I held back last night," he whispered, pressing his mouth against her throat.

"Oh, Paul, I am so happy that I want to cry. Am I a silly girl to want to cry? Am I just a sainted little hick?"

She clung to him, the tears racing down her flushed cheeks.

"Sainted, yes, sweet little madonna face. But if you're a hick, then you'll enjoy all the places I'm going to take you to all the more, and I'll enjoy them all the more because of you. What could be more wonderful than a hick in Paris? We'll be married and go there at once. Say we shall, darling, right away."

"Oh, Paul, darling, I can't think. You're just sweeping me off my feet."

And she clung to him, as if a strong wind were really blowing her away.

"Don't think, sweetheart. Just say you love me and you'll marry me at once. I want you so, Helen."

They heard tiny footsteps pattering down the stairs.

"Hush," said Paul, and he stood away from her.

Mignon entered the room—that is,

she affected an entrance. She was radiant, and beautifully dressed. She walked across the room hand extended, expression eager.

"Paul," she cried. "How utterly delightful to see you!"

"And to see you," he answered, "for you can introduce me to your lovely friend."

"She is Helen Fielding, Paul. Helen, this is Mr. Dervish."

"And now, Mignon, may I have the pleasure, the extreme pleasure, of presenting my fiancée, soon to be Helen Fielding Dervish?"

Mignon's face turned white, but the man did not notice. He had taken Helen in his arms again.

Oh, the too sweet pain of love! The girl felt that she was suffocating. "But poor Mignon," she whispered.

"Sweet little saint, always thinking about some one else! Never fear for Mignon, though—she'll get along."

And indeed she had already. For she had not waited to hear more than the announcement of the engagement. She had dashed from the room and out into the garden, where she had found Dick. And Helen could see her through the window, looking very arch and lovely and coquettish.

"Paul," said Helen, "are you sure you love me and that you'll never be ashamed of me? And that you want me for your wife?"

"I adore you. I worship you. I revere you, too. How can you ask?"

"Because it's so wonderful to hear you say it, darling. It's so wonderful—that I'm afraid I'll wake up."

Blue eyes melting into golden eyes; curved red mouth against smooth generous lips.

A long, long kiss, a reverent kiss, a kiss of possession. A prayer and a promise.

"It's 'Paris Ahoy!' for you and me before many days have flown, my darling," he said tenderly. "'Paris Ahoy' on the good ship 'Matrimony,' and the dearest girl in the world for me, forever and ever!"

"Amen!" whispered Helen, and her eyes were like blue forget-me-nots, rain-drenched and lovely.

MOON OF ROMANCE

THE little moon steps timidly
Across the ballroom of the sky,
Her scarf is silver, fluttering.
She is afraid, and this is why:

She knows that in the shadows dark
Her lover waits. Like any maid
Who goes to keep a tryst at night,
She is half happy, half afraid.

—*Mary Carolyn Davies*

He seized her by the elbows, held her tight. "Who—who are you?" he demanded

"Little Lost Sweetheart"

By HELEN FRANKLIN

JUNE'S face was radiant; her long fringed blue eyes shone.

"Then you'll really—give me the job?"

Sam Horgan, manager of Temple Tavern, the famous after-theater resort, nodded, wondering at her delight. Didn't she know that any night-club manager would give her the job and congratulate himself on getting her? That tiny blond show-girl type was just what they wanted.

"Report this evening," he said, turning back to his desk under the photographs of celebrities.

Ruth Moore, who checked coats in the Tavern, and had told her there was work for another girl there, was waiting for her outside. Ruth knew from the expression on her friend's face that she had been successful.

"Think of it!" said June raptly, as they walked crosstown. "It means seeing him every night; not only to hear him, but to *look* at him, as he sings 'Little Lost Sweetheart'! It will be like heaven!"

June, you see, was in love; in love with a voice.

It sounds so trivial, but it wasn't trivial to her. The emotion the radio singer had aroused in her was the realest thing in her life. She had never seen Rocky Temple, owner of Temple Tavern, but she had seen hundreds of pictures of him, and owned at least a dozen.

And his yearning, rapturous, heart-

searching voice had wooed her repeatedly out of the starry reaches of the air. "Little Lost Sweetheart" was the song he sang most often, and she never felt that he was singing it to any one but her.

"Oh, Ruth—maybe he'll even speak to me sometimes!"

Ruth didn't laugh, as another girl might have.

"That's what I thought when I went to work there," she replied, "and he does nod or smile once in a while. But he's so busy, June—and he seems so weary of it all. His eyes look just like a tired little boy's. His desk is always heaped high with letters from girls everywhere—he hasn't even time to read them."

"But he doesn't think about all those girls, does he, Ruth?" June asked, almost jealously.

"No," said Ruth, "I don't think he does. It would make his heart ache if he did. But he doesn't realize what he means to a world of girls—that he's their escape from loneliness. And he's probably the loneliest man in the world himself."

"How can a man like that be lonely?" asked June. "Why, it will keep me from being lonely just to *see* him every night! I've never been so happy in my life, Ruth, though as far as he's concerned I might as well be a thousand miles away." The rapturous fires suddenly died out in her eyes.

"Yes," said Ruth, "I'm afraid you might as well be a thousand miles away."

THE tall, brown-eyed, wavy-haired young fellow lowered the megaphone. It was seconds before the enchanted spell of his voice was broken. And then, from every table in his mirrored and satin-valanced night club, applause, which broke over the spotlighted stage in a tidal wave of tribute.

June stood gripping the half door of the coat room, looking into the crowded room. Her face wore a dazed expression. It was disillusion, cruel disillusion. Why, Rocky Temple, the dear brown-eyed boy with the wondrous voice, wasn't hers! He and his song belonged to those people, all those people clapping with their hands!

She felt like one robbed of the nearest and dearest thing in life. She turned quickly and went back between the racks, her eyes brimming. On the radio it had seemed so intimate; you just didn't realize he was singing to the world. But here you couldn't help realizing.

June stood between the racks and covered her face with her hands. She didn't see Rocky Temple come hurrying between the tables and out into the foyer. He pushed open the half door and came toward her.

There was a full minute while June didn't breathe, as he held her by the elbows, and looked deep into her eyes.

"What's the matter? Who—who are you?" he said.

"I'm June," she answered, trembling. "I work here."

"I noticed how you looked at me—I couldn't help noticing. You seemed startled, even hurt. What was the matter?"

"Nuh-nothing," said June.

Rocky released her, smiling almost shyly, as though he had just realized how impulsive he had been.

In a moment he was more real, more human, to June than he had ever been, though she still wasn't sure she wasn't dreaming.

"Gosh, I hate to see a little girl cry," he said.

June smiled then, and her eyes began to shine.

"I know what it is to be blue myself," he told her. He would have gone on, but just then Sam Horgan came pushing in, seized his arm.

"Come on, Rocky! What's the idea? We're doing capacity business to-night. Don't walk out on 'em."

Rocky looked at him guiltily, like a little boy caught in some prank.

"I'm going right back, Sam."

"Well, come on then," said the other, refusing to let go of him.

Rocky looked back over his shoulder as he was led away. "Don't be blue any more, will you?" he called to June. "I'll have the boys sing a funny song for you."

June didn't see him to speak to the next night nor the night after. They were both too busy. But Rocky did manage to glance her way at intervals each evening, and smile at her from the dais.

The girl was living miles above the clouds. How often the angel who records dreams must have smiled!

ONE night when she came on duty June found the singer leaning on the sill of the coat room window.

She couldn't help blushing as she greeted him.

"You know, I've been thinking of your eyes," he said, in his slow, drawling voice. "They're like baby spotlights—and you're the sweetest girl I know."

"You tell them all that," said June, hanging her head.

"I've never said it to a girl before," he answered soberly. "How could I, when I've never been in love?"

"Then how can you sing so beautifully of love?"

He smiled, a tender and whimsical smile. "Imagination, I guess," he told her. "When I sing 'Little Lost Sweetheart,' I'm singing to a sweetheart I never had, much less lost . . . Until I found you, June, I did not dream what love could be like; how quickly it could come—like lightning striking you."

The girl's heart was pounding so loudly she could scarcely hear him. He came closer, took her chin in his hand. "June," he whispered, "whenever I sing that song again it will be for you alone—"

And then once again Sam Horgan intervened. He had with him this time a beautifully gowned young woman.

"I want you to meet Elinor Chase," he said. "She is a special writer with the *Courier-Star,* and wants an interview."

Rocky turned away with the girl while Sam handed her wrap to June. He was scowling heavily, and a pang of uneasiness shot through her. As she hung up the wrap a slip of paper fell unnoticed from its folds.

When June returned to the window Rocky and the newspaper woman had disappeared, but Sam still stood there.

"Come back to my office as soon as you can leave," he told her sharply before he went away.

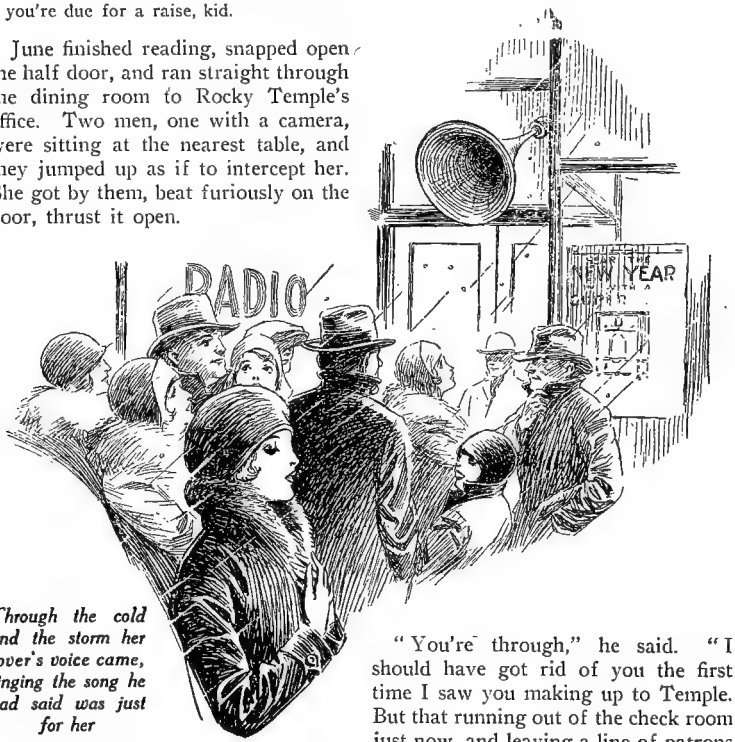
As June looked after him a clammy fear crept over her. What if he should fire her?

She reached down absently and picked up the scrap of paper from the floor, turned it over and smoothed it out. It had the *Courier-Star* letterhead, and the words leaped up at her:

> Have decided to give you the Temple assignment—you're the only one who's got nerve enough to take it. But watch your step. Be sure you're alone with

him before you start any funny stuff. The chances are he won't give you a tumble, but frame him anyway. Knock something over, make a racket. Gus and Madden will be planted outside, and if they get a picture of you in a clinch we'll have as big a scoop as this sheet ever had. Handle this right, and you're due for a raise, kid.

June finished reading, snapped open the half door, and ran straight through the dining room to Rocky Temple's office. Two men, one with a camera, were sitting at the nearest table, and they jumped up as if to intercept her. She got by them, beat furiously on the door, thrust it open.



Through the cold and the storm her lover's voice came, singing the song he had said was just for her

"You'd better read this right away, Mr. Temple," she said, pushing the assignment slip into his hands.

He read it with expressionless eyes, then nodded to June.

"Thank you."

She walked out of the office, and as she did so, came face to face with Sam Horgan.

"I was just coming after you," he said, giving her a malevolent look. "Come with me. I've got something to say."

He sat down at his desk and reached for his check book.

"You're through," he said. "I should have got rid of you the first time I saw you making up to Temple. But that running out of the check room just now, and leaving a line of patrons waiting for service was the last straw. You haven't learned to keep your place."

"But, Mr. Horgan, I—"

"Don't tell me! I don't want to hear anything else outta you. All you janes lose your head over that guy, and you don't know what you're doin'."

June stood trembling, unable to speak.

"Here!" he said, and thrust a check into her hand. "Your connection with this place is over."

June opened her mouth to plead with him. Why, if he had any regard at all for Rocky he'd appreciate what she had done—averted a scandal.

But Sam Horgan had no regard for Rocky; in fact, he was jealous of the boy.

What was the use? She'd been a fool ever to come here. It wouldn't have been so hard to go on if Rocky had not ceased to be a dream, and become a reality—absolutely essential to all the days that had to be lived through henceforth. And she was nothing to him—nothing. Why should the idol of a thousand girls think twice of a little nobody who didn't even have a job any longer?

She went out into the dark street. It had begun to snow. The flakes fell on her face as she walked along; her feet grew numb in their thin slippers. She began to cry, quite frankly, and trusted the snow to hide the tears.

Arrived at her tiny uptown room, she took off her wet things, curled up on the bed like a woebegone little kitten, and sobbed herself to sleep.

IT was absolutely necessary to get a job, and after dreary days of hunting, the only one she found open was in a department store. It was only temporary work, to last through the Christmas rush, but she was thankful for anything. She crept home at night so tired physically that she was ready to collapse.

The holiday passed cheerlessly, with an exchange of presents between her and the few girls with whom she was at all intimate. She had never felt lonelier, more sick at heart, and soon the wearisome search for work would begin again. Then came that biggest of all night-club nights—New Year's Eve. June was walking along the street, too stricken, too oppressed to stay in; the four walls of her room seemed like the walls of a haunted prison. Suddenly she heard Rocky's voice clearly in the snow-charged air. She stopped, startled. Was her mind playing her tricks? Then she saw the crowd of passers-by grouped around the radio store, listening to the low, sweet, throbbing voice that flowed from the loud speaker:

Little lost sweetheart—my own beloved.
Little lost heart of my heart.
Can't the sweet rapture we lost be recovered?
Why can't we make a new start?

It must be only a record, thought June. But no, you could hear the applause now. There was no applause on records! And Sam Horgan's voice announcing that the program was coming from Temple Tavern. He continued: "I'm going to ask Mr. Temple to sing 'Little Lost Sweetheart' just once more. If you please, Rocky."

June could picture the scene, and she stood dreaming, as snow fell about her, and the cold seemed to strike through to the bone. Rocky standing on the canopied stage with the megaphone raised to his lips. The blue spotlights. The dazzling array of people. Scurrying waiters. The atmosphere of splendor and sophistication.

Then Rocky began to sing again.

He had not sung further than the second bar when she began to tremble and breathe almost sobbingly. What was the new note in his voice? He was singing with such feeling that the crude, mechanical horn over the store door seemed almost human. She al-

most expected to see his face when she looked up.

And then the night club full of people faded from her mind. Rocky was singing to *her* again. Not to all those people, not to the thousands listening to him on the air. He was singing to his own little lost sweetheart. Hadn't he *said* it would be her song henceforth? He wanted her! Every note he sang told her so! There were hours of longing, worlds of passionate tenderness back of the heartbreaking melody now pouring into her soul.

June glanced around. Where was she? Could she get there by running? She was half sobbing as she found a taxi and threw herself into it, directing the driver to Temple Tavern.

Rocky was just lowering the megaphone as she came into the foyer. He saw her at once, but seemed to be afraid that the spotlights beating upon him were interfering with his sight. He tried to brush the beams aside, and then, dropping the megaphone, he was coming between the tables, while applause rocked the club, and people turned to gaze after him.

The girl fled into the coat room and between the racks, and he followed. She was in his arms before she knew, and they were alone and hidden from sight.

"June! June, darling! Did you know I was singing to you? I've missed you so. Sam was terribly sorry he'd treated you so, after I made him understand what you'd done for me. And there was no way to find you except to sing to you, and hope you'd hear. Will you stay with me—marry me—never go away and get 'lost' again?"

Devotion poured from him in a torrent. She could hardly lift her eyes to his handsome, earnest face. But soon:

"Are you sure you want me, Rocky?"

"Want you! I want nobody *but* you, June! Why, I don't want to let you out of my sight, now that I've found you again."

He bent his head and his kisses swept through her like warm wine. "Little Lost Sweetheart!" he murmured.

She shook her head.

"All that's lost now is my heart, Rocky—and that's safe, because it's lost to you."

PARADISE

O COULD you ever look at me
With eyes that really, truly see
The garden Love plants in my eyes,
You'd seek no other Paradise.

—*Eliot Kays Stone*

His brown eyes seemed to look into her very soul. Cissy shivered

The River of Love

By FLORENCE ELENORA GOODRICH

CISSY couldn't prevent her sisters' beaux from falling in love with her. But—as Cissy reassured her conscience—the men who came to the Baker home weren't really her sisters' beaux. They met Cissy before they reached the stage of courtship, and the least susceptible of men couldn't prevent a quickened heartbeat at the sight of her wide, dark blue eyes and the soft golden ringlets which adorned her small head. Her five feet five inches was composed of delightful curves, warm pink flesh and challenging, lithesome grace. Added to that was a quick, merry smile and a pleasing, kitten-like manner in keeping with her seventeen years.

As Cissy peeked out of the front window of the Baker winter home in southeastern Florida, she saw that the man sitting on the front porch with her eldest sister—Edna, aged twenty-five—was different from the ordinary run of men. It wasn't only his appearance that aroused Cissy's interest. This new man was the lean, rugged type popularized by the movies and all present-day fiction. But his charm went deeper than a matter of features and build.

"The man's got personality," Cissy whispered to Louise, aged twenty-two, who was peering over her shoulder. "It just oozes out of him."

"Edna was darn lucky to get a date with him," agreed Louise, but added

with unconscious bitterness, "but she'll be still luckier if she keeps him after he lamps you."

"Silly!" murmured Cissy. "Where do you suppose she met him?"

"On the club veranda," was the reply. "His name is Roger Morton. He's going away somewhere."

"I'd like to meet him," sighed Cissy, "but Edna will kill me if I horn in."

"I wouldn't blame her," replied Louise. "I've often felt the same impulse."

Cissy glanced momentarily at her sister's plump build—similar to Edna's—and mouse-colored hair. A pang of genuine sympathy was immediately quenched by another glimpse at the stranger. She simply had to meet him and she couldn't lose any time, especially if he was going away soon. Anyway, Cissy knew that this man wasn't the kind to be bowled over by a pretty face. If his soul called to hers, it would be a sweeter call—and more irresistible—than a merely physical one.

Her reasoning proved her to be idealistic as well as young. She was also resourceful, for a few minutes later she had decided on a plan.

"We'll clear out," she told Louise. "You can spend the evening with Gladys and I'll chin with Dot Levering."

"All right," agreed the unsuspecting Louise. "But where are the ukulele swains to-night?"

"A couple of them wanted dates and I couldn't decide between them, so I refused both. A night off seems good for a change."

THE sisters walked over to Dot's home—just a block—and there parted company.

A mischievous grin overspread Cissy's face as she rang Dot's doorbell. Dot's brother opened the front door.

"Hello, Bob," greeted Cissy coolly. "Is Dot home?"

"You know darn well she's out. Are you calling on me?"

Cissy had the grace to blush. "Bob, do me a favor, will you?"

"Maybe. Shoot."

"In ten minutes call up Edna and talk to her as long as you can keep her at the phone. Will you?"

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"Just a rotten trick I want to play on her," confessed Cissy frankly, "and you're the only person I can trust to do it and not give me away. Will you phone exactly ten minutes after I leave here?"

Bob studied the flushed, animated face for a moment. "I always suspected you could harbor ideas in your shining dome, even though said ideas were deviltries."

"Will you do it?" demanded Cissy impatiently.

"I suppose so," the young man conceded. "What do I get out of it?"

"A date a week from next Wednesday," promised Cissy.

"It's worth it. In ten minutes I'll ring Edna."

"Thanks." Cissy sauntered home and entered the back door. A few minutes later the telephone bell rang and she dutifully summoned her sister.

Edna got to her feet slowly; Roger to his more hastily. "Cissy, this is Mr. Morton," Edna explained in a reluctant tone. "Roger, this is my youngest sister. Pardon me for just a moment."

"Certainly," replied Roger courteously, as he accepted the small hand Cissy offered him. He looked down into Cissy's starry eyes and for once it was the girl's heartbeats that quickened.

She shivered slightly; the brown eyes seemed to look into her very soul.

"I know I haven't met you before," she murmured, smiling. "Are you a stranger in town?"

"I come here occasionally to visit relatives," he explained.

"This is a lovely evening," said Cissy irrelevantly. "I was just going to stroll down the river and watch the moon."

"It takes two people to watch the moon, doesn't it?" asked Roger.

"Better results are obtained by two," admitted Cissy solemnly, "but I often go there alone before going to bed. Sometimes I sit there for hours."

Edna came out on the porch and the younger girl arose dutifully.

"Good night, Mr. Morton. Good night, Edna," she said and immediately vanished into the house.

Half an hour later, Cissy, seated on a bench at the edge of the river, heard approaching footsteps. She sat quietly, knowing that her light dress would reveal her presence.

"Found the moon, Cissy?" asked a voice that brought delightful shivers to the girl. She moved to one side of the bench and Roger sat close to her.

"I guess it's hiding behind the pine trees," she replied, studying his rugged face.

"Let the moon hide if it wants to. You are all I want to see."

"Most people come here to look at the river," explained Cissy, gazing at the smooth surface in which were reflected the giant palm trees which towered on the opposite bank. "Maybe they think it will disappear as suddenly as it appeared."

"Did it appear suddenly?" asked Roger, not that he was interested, but just for the pleasure of hearing her clear young voice.

"The Indians say it appeared overnight, and therefore they named it New River."

"That is a pretty legend," he said casually, "but now let's talk about ourselves."

"Will you sit here often with me?" she whispered.

"To-morrow I must go away—to be gone for several years at least." He put his arms around her—it seemed the natural thing to do. Cissy rested against him. "Tell me you feel the physical pull, the same thrilling interest in me, that I feel for you," pleaded the man.

"You know I do," she admitted honestly. "I want to know you better."

"My time is so short. I hate to leave you, honey."

"Where are you going?"

"Into the interior of Africa on a research expedition."

Cissy started.

"You—you have to go?" she faltered.

"Yes. My plans have been made for a long time. I won't even ask you to wait for me because it wouldn't be fair to so young a girl. But I'm coming back some day, Cissy girl, and if you're free—well, I'll rush you to the nearest minister." He bent to her soft, inviting lips, lingered until her body relaxed and her arms clung round his neck.

"Can't you take me with you?" she asked shamelessly.

"You really care for me?" he marveled.

"I love you," she murmured, "as I never thought I could care for a man. It hurts."

"Sweetheart, I wish I could take you along, but it's not possible. But I hope you'll write occasionally, and I'll

answer, and I want you to send me your picture."

AN hour later Cissy was sitting next the river, alone, miserable, and shakingly bewildered.

She had often been kissed by boys, but the pressure of Roger's lips had awakened her womanhood, had stirred the mating instinct, and Cissy longed to answer the call of her heart. Roger was her man and she wanted him.

"Oh, it's cruel," she mourned. "I love him and he'll be gone for years and years! How am I going to live without him? Next time, he'll just *have* to take me with him."

Cissy had never studied psychology and she knew nothing of the dangers of thwarted love. She didn't know that the very intensity of her love could so change her that she would no longer be the same Cissy.

After Roger left, a gradual change came over her. She ceased to be interested in boys.

"Tiresome little fools without a brain amongst the lot of them!" was the way she catalogued them to Louise.

"Who cares about brains?" questioned Louise. "They're good fun and no one should know it better than you."

"All they want to do is pet," complained Cissy.

"Do they?" queried her sister wistfully. "I wish I had your chances." So did Edna. But Cissy continued to let her chances slip, and to long for Roger.

When she entered her senior year at high school, she decided to go in for science. She signed up for both biology and chemistry, which she took seriously. She continually wandered over the countryside in search of specimens. Of course her high-heeled slippers had to be discarded for flat oxfords, and her frilly, feminine dresses were replaced by severely plain dark tailored clothes for school, and knickers and blouses for hiking. Her "dates" became less and less frequent.

As Cissy became less flauntingly feminine, her sisters seemed to become more and more attractive to men. They had the good sense to make the most of their opportunity. The males who were attracted to the lively, buxom Baker girls, saw little to admire in the indifferent, scholarly sister.

At college—in Massachusetts—Cissy took up geology, astronomy, more biology—and spectacles.

The winter after her graduation, she went back home to be a companion to her widowed mother. The other girls had married and flown from the parental nest.

Mrs. Baker often watched her child anxiously. "When you marry, Cissy," she told the girl wistfully, "I'll sell this old place and just visit you girls in turn. I'll kind of like doing that."

"You probably won't be able to visit me," replied Cissy. "I'll be so far away." For Cissy never doubted that some day she would be Roger Morton's wife and would travel with him.

Cissy, angular, bespectacled, and studious, was now known as the least attractive of the Baker girls. Her hair —longer and not so golden—was pulled into an uncompromising knot at the back of her neck. Her mannish clothes were a source of annoyance to her sisters.

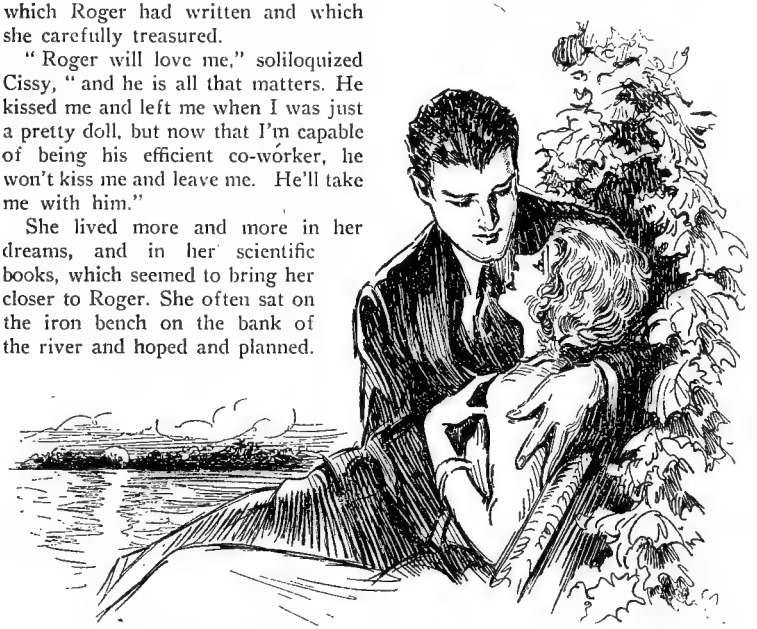
"I can't understand, Doris," complained Edna. "Why do you wear such hideous clothes? You used to be such an attractive youngster. Now you positively frighten away all the men who might become interested in you."

"I have no desire to attract men." Cissy shrugged indifferently.

"I can't understand what changed you so," marveled her sisters for the hundredth time, forgetting that they owed their own chances to the change in Cissy. The girl had not told them of her sudden, brief love affair, nor had they seen the few foreign letters which Roger had written and which she carefully treasured.

"Roger will love me," soliloquized Cissy, "and he is all that matters. He kissed me and left me when I was just a pretty doll, but now that I'm capable of being his efficient co-worker, he won't kiss me and leave me. He'll take me with him."

She lived more and more in her dreams, and in her scientific books, which seemed to bring her closer to Roger. She often sat on the iron bench on the bank of the river and hoped and planned.



He drew away from her upturned lips. *"That was a good-by kiss," he said*

"My romance is like this river," she thought as she gazed at the semi-tropical stream. "New River is the deepest river in Florida and my love is the deepest love any one could experience. And my love sprang into being as suddenly as this river, and is as deathless."

SIX years after their meeting, Roger suddenly reappeared. The first night, at dusk, he called on Cissy.

On the cool porch, shaded by large palms, she was sitting alone.

"Is Miss Cissy Baker at home?" asked Roger respectfully of the dim figure in the semi-darkness.

"I am Cissy," replied the girl, "and it is really you, is it, Roger Morton? I began to fear you would never return." Her voice rang gladly.

Roger sprang up the steps and reached for her hands. "I told you I'd come back and here I am, hungry for a sight of you. Your picture has been my inspiration all these years, but I longed constantly for the flesh and blood girl. Can't we turn on the lamp so I may feast my eyes before eating you up?"

Cissy laughed merrily for the first

time in six years. She pulled the light chain and Roger's features became distinct. His skin and hair were burned to the same shade of bronze. There was a greater strength in his lean face and his firm mouth. His brown eyes returned the girl's stare for a long, stupefied moment.

"You aren't going to a masquerade to-night, are you?" he asked without thinking, as a man will strike out when he has received an unexpected blow.

"Of course not. Why do you ask?"

"Your trick make-up. My little Cissy wore a rose-colored dress and had two stars for eyes and a rosebud for a mouth. And her voice was a flute which promised me paradise." He walked to the lamp and pulled the cord. He sat down near Cissy in the dark.

"You studied poetry in Africa?" she asked coldly. Her very heart seemed to freeze.

"Tell me what you've done to yourself," he demanded, and there was a bitter note in his voice.

"I haven't cared for frivolities," explained Cissy icily. "I studied and read many scientific books so that I might be a real helpmate to the man I loved. I am a strong, healthy, intelligent woman who is capable of working in any country with her mate and who is capable of bearing her full share of his burdens. You are clearly disappointed in me and I am even more bitterly disappointed in you. I might have married any one of a number of men who admired my former baby-doll prettiness, but I thought you were different. I thought you loved me for what you felt could be developed in me. For the bond of understanding and comradeship which might have brought us happiness. Since we both have worshipped a myth, an ideal person who does not exist, there is no use prolonging this scene. I think you had better go now."

Roger stood up. "My family are expecting me home early to hear some of my adventures." He changed the subject. "Cissy, six years ago I kissed an eager, charming little girl, and ever since I have loved that girl. I can't believe she no longer exists. I want to ask a big favor of you. I am going away the day after to-morrow. I'll be in Washington for three months and possibly go next to South America. To-morrow is my last night here. Can't I spend it on the river bank with the old Cissy?"

"She has grown up, Roger." Cissy's voice was colorless.

"Resurrect her for one night," he pleaded. "The memory will mean so much to me."

"Is it only a matter of clothes?"

"Not entirely. Get your hair waved or curled. Put on high-heeled slippers, and a bright, frilly dress. That isn't too much of a favor for an old friend to ask, is it?"

"It is so utterly silly, Roger, that I do not feel inclined to grant your request. You may drop in, however, for a few moments to say good-by if you wish. No doubt you will find me here on the porch."

"So I may come for another good-by kiss?" he asked with bitterness.

"Of course I didn't mean that," denied Cissy coldly.

"I'll come," he decided, "and I'll expect to find that you've dolled up a little for me. To refuse would be an insult."

"To ask me to 'doll up' is more of an insult!"

That night Cissy did not sleep. "Do I still love him?" she asked herself. "Shall I try to win him? To-morrow will probably be my last chance."

The next afternoon she visited a beauty parlor. She had a facial, a manicure, a shampoo, and a finger wave. Her face was delicately rouged; her mouth painted; her eyelashes subtly lengthened by mascara; her eyelids shaded; her brows plucked and blackened to a fine line. The result was astonishing. She wasn't the wistfully lovely Cissy of old, but she was far more enchanting. Her beauty was mysterious, sophisticated, and beckoning. Unlike the sirens of old, she didn't need to sing nor pluck a harp to draw men to their doom. She didn't even have to flash come-hither glances. All she had to do was to get in the range of vision of any man, and he would promptly and gladly do the rest.

She went into a dress shop and walked out in a printed georgette frock and high-heeled slippers. It wasn't easy for her to walk on the unaccustomed heels so she picked her way slowly and cautiously.

She passed a barber shop, but she did not see the pleased surprise on Roger Morton's face, nor the smile on the barber's.

"Well, look at Cissy Baker," said the latter with a low whistle of surprise "She used to be the prettiest of the Baker girls and it looks like she still is. My nephew's coming here to visit next week. I'll have to see that he meets Cissy."

Some one else met Cissy and Roger watched the meeting. Bob Levering, coming from the opposite direction, stopped in amazement.

"Why, Cissy Baker! I haven't seen you for a long time." He turned and walked home with her. "May I run in to-night to talk to you?"

"I'll be busy to-night," she explained.

"How about to-morrow night?"

"Telephone if you wish. I don't know whether I'll be home or not."

Cissy was anxious to get rid of Bob, but she lacked experience in dealing with men. He accompanied her to her door.

"I'll see you to-morrow," he whispered ardently.

She ran in without replying. Up to her room she hurried and looked at herself in the mirror. Flushed and angered, her reflection glared back at her. "So that is all men want," she panted. "They're disgusting! I can't ensnare a man by artificial means. If Roger wants a pretty shell, let him marry a wax dummy from a department store window. I love him, but if he can't appreciate the worth of true love, I'll have to get along without him for the rest of my life—just as I've done for the past six years."

She slowly took off the new clothes and got into the bathtub. She rubbed and soaped and scrubbed. The hot bath didn't take the wave out of her hair, so she shampooed it again.

AT eight o'clock Roger approached the Baker home, from the direction of New River. He found Cissy sitting on the porch, clad in the same frock she had worn the previous night. He stopped at the foot of the steps and glared at her. His penetrating brown eyes looked her over from head to toes.

"Come here, Cissy, and walk to the river with me," he commanded sternly.

The girl meekly and silently joined him. She felt like a disobedient child. All the starch had gone out of her. She slumped onto the iron bench and stared miserably at the quiet river.

Roger, without speaking, sat down next to her.

Twilight merged into darkness. A

sliver of moon was a gleaming ornament in the blue sky, but failed to light the scene.

She was thinking, "Oh, what a fool I've been! I'd pay any price to belong to Roger. Suppose I do have to look my best? It is more than worth it." But she managed to squeeze back the tears.

"I came to kiss you good-by," said Roger tonelessly.

It never occurred to Cissy to plead her case. Dutifully, but wearily she tilted her face toward him and waited for the pressure of his lips.

He put his arms around her slender shoulders and deliberately lowered his mouth to hers. Warmth flowed back into Cissy's body at the vitalizing contact.

She relaxed and her arms tightened around his neck.

While their lips still clung, a plan formed in Cissy's brain. "I won't let him go without me," she determined. "I'll get on the same train. I'll go to the same hotel in Washington, and I'll be so pretty that he'll want to marry me."

That settled, she gave herself wholly to the enjoyment of his embrace, the world well lost.

Several moments later, the man raised his head a few inches. "That was a good-by kiss, Cissy," he murmured. The girl shivered violently and his arms tightened about her in a protecting clasp.

"Like fun it is," she thought grimly. "I'm going to have lots more of them from you."

Roger continued: "It was good-by until early to-morrow morning when I intend to call for you in a taxi, take you to the courthouse, the minister's and then Washington."

Cissy tried to read his face in the darkness. "But you don't like me the way I am," she protested weakly.

"I was disappointed because you did not value your beauty, which was meant to be admired and to give pleasure to all who beheld it. But perhaps it's better this way. I won't have to worry about other men ogling you and perhaps I'd lose you to a better looking man than I am."

"Then you don't want me to change?" she asked happily.

"I love you as you are," he said in a cautious tone, "but it might help me—in Washington especially—if my wife were more than ordinarily attractive. However, that is entirely up to you, sweetheart."

"Oh, Roger darling, I'm so happy to think you love me for myself," she exulted, "and I'll never forget you proposed before learning I can still be attractive. Now I know you're different from other men. You are wonderful."

The darkness hid Roger's amused smile. "I love you, Cissy girl, and will do anything for you. Perhaps we could even take a later train than I intended, for I suppose you'd like to visit a beauty parlor before your wedding," he suggested.

"Oh, I would like to do just that, and you'll get a real surprise when you see me. Truly, I'll be almost beautiful again. But I'll never forget that you loved me before you knew it." Cissy fondly glanced at the deep river which seemed to her to typify her swiftly created, everasting love.

Roger again kissed her good-by, or more correctly, good night. Both their hearts beat faster as they thought of the radiantly beautiful girl who would wed on the morrow—and of Roger's delighted surprise at his bride's loveliness.

Planets of Destiny

By CAROL YOUNG

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at end of this department. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

No personal questions will be answered by direct mail, but if you will send ten cents in stamps to cover cost of mailing, All-Story will be glad to return to you a short estimate of your character and of the future influences for those in your Zodiacal sign, giving suggestions for at least the next two years.

DAILY ASTROLOGICAL GUIDE

For the Next Two Weeks

December 13—Not a strong day; take it easy in the usual line of activity.

December 14—A poor day for most people; don't be drawn into arguments.

December 15—Getting better; much more pleasant in the later hours.

December 16—A risky and angry day; be tactful and diplomatic all the way.

December 17—Improving again; but not sufficiently so to take long chances.

December 18—A highly mental day; plan necessary changes if you have to.

December 19—Good for most everything except emotions with the other sex.

December 20—Things are not what they seem, so take no chances of any kind.

December 21—Poor financially in the morning, but good later in the day.

December 22—Take care of all important matters with intelligence to-day.

December 23—Another good day, but not for serious matters in the afternoon.

December 24—A neutral day; don't try to accomplish too much.

December 25—A pleasant Christmas is promised to the majority.

December 26—Generally favorable for mental and money matters; make it count.

PERSONAL INFLUENCES

This is a good time—during the next couple of weeks—for natives of January 1 to 13 to settle matters related to children and the finances of legal affairs or partnerships; entertainment, love affairs and general relations with the community are also to be here included for these folks. Those

Go gle

born January 3 to 7 should continue to be careful of health, finances and relations with those above and older, as explained in the last issue. If you were born April 1 to 6, inclusive, be careful of all dealings with superiors; if you are a woman of this group, be particularly cautious in your reactions to the men in close relationship, such as husband, brother, sweetheart. Don't allow yourself to become too easily disheartened. Those born July 7 to 12 should now take measures to collect money that is owed to them, particularly if there is a legal aspect to the matter; also, see to it that wife, husband or partner does not become extravagant at your expense, if you are one of this group. Natives of August 6 to 10 are now enthusiastic about business, occupation, relations with the public, love affairs and many of the emotional parts of life, including the entertaining arts—and that is the way they should be, provided they do not carry it too far and lose their heads foolishly. Sons and daughters of August 26 to 30 should now hold back on all cloudy and nebulous matters, whether related to love or occupation, but particularly if there is any connection between what they want to do and the gratification of pure emotion, for the result would be negative. Those born November 15 to 20 should be having a good time socially at present, but there is danger of error if they make decisions in regard to matrimony. Deal with executives, leaders and superiors—making reasonable requests for what you are sure you are entitled to—if your birthday falls between December 13 and 26.

MARY PICKFORD

If we measure success by the number of people who have received pleasure, service or benefit of any kind, from individual effort, then we must certainly hand a wreath of laurel to Mary Pickford. For she has to her credit the longest record of sustained entertaining in the list of film celebrities. Others have come and for the time of their brief stay temporarily held the public, never, however, getting them away from Our Mary.

Think it over. A generation has been born, grown to maturity, and had children of its own since Mary Pickford captured and held her first audience!

She has demonstrated an appeal that is as close to universal as has ever been attained on the screen. Here and there are wiseguys and super-critics who disclaim a liking for her work; but they are so much in the minority that they have not influenced either her or the public. I may be one of those highbrows myself, not being among those who have raved over the film work of Mary Pickford, but I've got to hand it to her for achieving the marathon popularity record.

And her horoscope shows that she deserves every bit of her success. Of course, her pocketbook is fat and bulging with the nickels and dimes of her earlier triumphs in the old nickelodeons, as well as with the one and two-dollar bills of her later successes. She is worth well over a million, and I, for one, am glad she is. The old days of artists dying in cold garrets for lack of nourishment and becoming famous years later are happily over. To-day we recognize and pay for the highest types of excellence. The world is getting better.

Mary was born April 9, 1893, at approximately 3 A.M., in Toronto, Canada. When I met her, she explained to me that this was the correct data, although she has always celebrated April 8. This was because one of her very dear relatives was born on the eighth and they always had their party together.

Her horoscope shows many of the rules for success in celluloid, although it is not strong for the talkies. She has Sagittarius at the mid-heaven, one of the indicators of success in entertainment. This, for the benefit of the students who are following my remarks here, is because Sagittarius is the fifth sign from Leo, the solar foundation of the Zodiac. The fifth is the location of artistic ability and the capacity for attracting the interest of the public in such lines. The mid-heaven is the location of occupational excellence. Putting these two together, we see how well they forecast her success.

Another strong index to motion picture prominence is to be found in the twelfth section of the natal chart. An examination of hundreds of the nativities of popular screen personalities reveals that all of them have remarkably powerful twelfth divisions, or houses, as they are called in astrological parlance. This is the so-called "accident of birth," and it explains how another person born on the same day in the same hospital, but at a different hour, would be totally different from Mary Pickford, both as to the profession in which success can be attained and in the personality itself. I know a woman born the same day as Helen Kellar, within a few miles of the birthplace of the blind girl; yet my friend has no such physical defects. It's all in the time of entry into the world.

Getting back to Mary and her twelfth house, that is the location of the Moon at the time of her birth, in the executive sign Capricorn, ruling the sixth, the house of service, showing her contact with the public should be from behind the scenes, or, as it always is in the movies, through the medium of her shadow. The projection on the screen is certainly a shadow, and thousands of years ago the ancients designated the twelfth as The House of Shadows!

Something that every one doesn't know about Mary:

For years, when resting between scenes on the

set she has put in her time with private tutors, learning foreign languages, studying every minute of her spare time on such things as history, manners, modes, customs, and in all possible ways building herself up as a bigger and better individual. This is shown astrologically by the fact that her ruler is the ever inquiring Uranus (she has Aquarius rising at the Ascendant) and also because this body is seen at the sensitive point of the ninth division, that of distant places, travel, philosophy, religion and higher psychology, explaining her deep and lasting interest in things beyond and ahead of her immediate surroundings.

Looking ahead for Mary, it is apparent that she has a rather tough set of circumstances in the near future, from now till next May. Then things will become, temporarily, slightly more comfortable for her, but not for long. She will have some sort of separation, and it will be easily apparent to the public gaze, for it will affect her professionally. She is apt to attempt something in the nature of an ill-advised personal venture that would turn out badly. I hope she takes this warning and holds back on all such things for at least two more years. After that, she will still have many more good years ahead of her in the talking pictures if she will concentrate on the portrayal of eccentric characters, without too much attempt at popular appeal.

MATRIMONY SERVICE

Here we are again. Remember that the following list shows the initials, the birthday, and the next best time for making a correct decision as to whether or not you should get married. I do not tell you to marry. But I do tell you at what time you will be able to tell from within yourself whether you should. Between now and the date mentioned after your initials, it would not be wise to make any definite moves one way or the other. I am not saying that the date mentioned will be the only good time—you may have many other opportunities to make the same decision later; but the time given is positively your *next* good period for emotional decisions.

R. S., August 29, 1912—September, 1932.
E. M. K., November 20, 1907—July, 1931.
B. E., October 19, 1909—September, 1934.
Mrs. O. M., March 2, 1889—March, 1931.
H. E., December 7, 1909—September, 1931.
M. C., September 19, 1907—August, 1933.
J. B., April 17, 1910—July, 1932.
C. L., March 10, 1915—March, 1939.
E. L., November 3, 1912—November, 1934.
M. B., September 3, 1903—January, 1937.
M. C., November 30, 1901—December, 1935.
V. W. (?), August 10, 1910—October, 1931.
G. C. S., May 26, 1906—October, 1933.
Mrs. E. S., August 8, 1864—September, 1931.
M. R., March 2, 1904—April, 1931.
T. C., February 2, 1913—January, 1936.
A. N., April 29, 1908—January, 1937.
E. H., April 20, 1901—November, 1936.
L. E. G., June 23, 1912—January, 1939.
O. H. S., April 22, 1892—August, 1932.
H. E. R., April 5, 1900—September, 1931.
N. L., March 25, 1911—June, 1939.
H. J. R., December 21, 1913—June, 1940.
Mrs. F. H., May 16, 1903—March, 1937.
Mrs. E. McC., March 11, 1891—May, 1931.
C. F., February 2, 1907—October, 1932.
Mrs. B. L., September 16, 1886—Dec., 1932.
W. P., April 13, 1913—March, 1936.
M. B. S., July 2, 1908—November, 1935.
H. L. N., September 27, 1905—September, 1933.
D. M. S., November 21, 1913—October, 1935.
E. W. B., June 21, 1889—October, 1934.
H. W., February 12, 1906—March, 1938.
M. A., January 18, 1910—September, 1933.
M. E. V., October 23, 1911—May, 1938.
M. B., January 18, 1909—August, 1933.
A. S., July 30, 1898—August, 1931.
M. E. H., January 14, 1912—March, 1937.
H. S., March 20, 1910—April, 1931.
Mrs. M. R., October 23, 1891—September, 1933.
J. K., April 27, 1913—June, 1940.
Mrs. A. E. L., September 26, 1870—Sept., 1933.
M. H., April 22, 1883—August, 1932.
D. V., December 24, 1880—August, 1932.
Mrs. B. C. K. R., July 5, 1888—April, 1931.
B. R., September 17, 1903—August, 1933.
B. N., March 4, 1910—April, 1931.
B. L. M., October 17, 1893—September, 1934
M. C. M., April 1, 1912—December, 1935.
B. M. LaR., December 20, 1903—July, 1932.
J. K., July 30, 1912—December, 1935.
E. L. K., May 12, 1911—August, 1933.
E. K., November 19, 1907—October, 1935.
M. C. K., September 9, 1907—October, 1932.
J. J. J., October 28, 1905—November, 1934.
C. G., March 30, 1900—July, 1931.
N. DeS., April 2, 1903—September, 1931.
T. F. P. C., September 27, 1884—Sept., 1933.
T. B., November 20, 1907—July, 1931.
E. A., October 18, 1900—September, 1934.
M. F., April 12, 1912—March, 1937.
L. T., December 11, 1913—March, 1940.
L. I. O., October 24, 1912—May, 1938.
T. C., December 4, 1882—September, 1931.
M. T. H., October 5, 1911—November, 1933.
I. D., March 8, 1888—January, 1935.
I. M. G., September 19 (?), 1914—April, 1937.

OCCUPATIONAL

A. W. M., January 23, 1904; mechanical work is good for you, but chiefly in the theoretical side of it; avoid yielding to bunches; be practical.

Mrs. A. M. E., December 6, 1906; you have all the necessary equipment for an excellent musician; keep at it. Rome wasn't built overnight.

Mrs. B. A., November 12, 1906; your artistic tendencies are worth cultivating; make them practical in every possible way.

Mrs. L. W. J., February 23, 1907; designing, artistic work, interior decoration—architecture, if you have the training.

E. H. (?), June 20, 1886; this has been a poor year for you; but you can succeed in some deep and philosophical pursuit; find it and go to it.

H. C. R., January 25, 1899; scientific and mechanical lines are good for you; see what you can do to benefit older people, especially women.

HERE'S THE REASON

Many readers become impatient if the answer to their question does not appear in the very next issue of the magazine. This is impossible for at least two reasons: the magazine is made up a month or two in advance of publication date, and also questions come in so fast that it is all Carol Young can do to keep up with them. So please be patient until it is your turn. You may be sure no question will be overlooked and all will be answered as speedily as space permits.

If you miss the issue containing your answer, send remittance in stamps and it will be forwarded to you.

THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH QUESTION ASKED

CAROL YOUNG
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

This coupon is not good after Dec. 27. One question is allowed each reader.

Date of Birth..... ....., ... Time.....
MONTH DATE YEAR A.M. OR P.M.

Place..... Sex.....
MALE OR FEMALE

QUESTION:

.....

.....

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

If you wish interpretation of your Zodiacal sign, inclose ten cents (see rules).

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but ten cents and a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

NOT a few of my fair correspondents question me about "the marrying age," or "how much older should my husband be than myself?" The latter runs neck and neck with the former in popularity.

In answer to these questions, I am not aware of any marrying age. Love is like a bolt of lightning. It either hits or it doesn't hit. And when it hits it leaves its impression so indelibly the victims find only one course open to them. And that course is marriage. So since the "bolt of love" may hit a couple at fifty as easily as a boy and girl fifteen years old, age is entirely eliminated from the picture. Regarding the second question, it is always a better bet for a couple that the husband should be the older of the two. I grant you there is no specific reason for this opinion, but simply it looks more natural that the male should be the more mature member of the household. I would say personally the man should not be more than five years older.

Though I am anxious to go the limit with these questioners, I am compelled many times to be brief and rather snappy with my replies. It is necessary, since space is so important a factor in the production of a magazine such as ALL-STORY.

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

as shown by my hand write
adapt Sarah myself to Philip something better

(Miss Sarah L., Hibbing, Minn.) You impress me as a girl of understanding, one who knows her way about in the world. Your choice of sweetheart, however, is not so good as it might have been, and I say this for various reasons. Philip has not had the same opportunity in life as you have had, and in consequence you are inclined to overshadow the poor fellow. He might have to play "second fiddle" to you, and it is usually not a happy arrangement for the woman of the house to hold the reins and crack the whip. I don't blame you for all this pep with which you have been endowed; you have inherited it. Nevertheless, it is going to be hard for those less well endowed with whom you associate, and particularly with your choice of husband. Whether you would be happy with Philip is entirely a matter for yourself to settle. It is a case of a quiet, unassuming, peace-at-any-price sort of fellow, versus a woman with a more than average initiative and intelligence. Think this over. And perhaps you will come to the conclusion that your mate, your spiritual, mental and emotional equal, has not "hove into your ken" as yet. At least wait a while before definitely notifying the parson.

revealed to you by my handwriting.
Grace
Yet he who cannot see the
Albert

(Miss Grace H., Mason City, Iowa.) You appear to be a very emotional girl and a good deal more romantic than your fiancé. You are all gush and blarney, while Albert is prosaic and deep-thinking. Thank goodness for this, for when you two get married, he will act as a splendid compensation-balance to your nature. I see no reason why you two young folk should not be very happy when married. What your sweetheart lacks you make up for, and that's how it ought to be. Moreover, I see you have many splendid traits to your credit which ought to do much for your united happiness. For example, you have a bright and breezy disposition which enables you to make friends readily. You evidently love children and have a gracious way with you in the presence of old people. Albert, on the other hand, has fine business acumen and a large outlook on life. There is nothing small or petty about this sweetheart of yours. He is all man and no gristle. What more do you require? Oh, yes, the parson, and the sooner you fix things up with him for the wedding ceremony, the sooner you two will know what real happiness is. My best wishes to you both for a lifetime of joy.

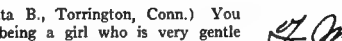
Caveant will place on sale
Mary
suggest that I follow? Do you
Pat

(Miss Mary W., Hutchinson, Kan.) Your letter interested me to this extent: it bore out what I have suspected after analyzing Pat's handwriting. I feel sorry for you, Mary, and on the other hand I feel like scolding you for running into the "lion's mouth" with your eyes wide open. No doubt Pat is a real nice chap in some respects. He may be a hit with the girls, and

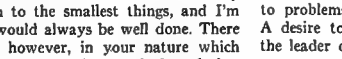
considered a good fellow with his men companions, as you say he is, but that does not make him a saint. He is still an Irishman, with all the intensity of his nationality in his blood. Since you come from the other side yourself, Mary, you know what they say in the old country that "a Scotchman's never happy unless he's miserable, and an Irishman is never at peace but when he's at war." So your Pat is running true to form. How you two took a tumble to each other is a mystery to me. It's the old, old truism once more exemplified: Cupid moves about in this old world in a mysterious way, his lovers to deceive. If the truth were told, you have made a mistake by falling in love with this fellow, and nothing but unhappiness is sure to be your lot if you persist in hanging on to what I would call a forlorn hope. His very conduct has already proved this, so why hesitate longer about making a decision? My advice to you is give him the air and watch your step before you fall "head over ears in love" with another man.

(Miss Barbara P., Great Falls, Mont.) Let me start out by answering your question about ages. I have never been in favor of old men marrying young girls, or old women going to the altar with young men. I don't think it is natural, spiritually, mentally, or physically. I have never yet found it to work out satisfactorily. In your case, Barbara, it may be different. You say that Andrew is seventeen years your senior, "but still you are crazy about him." Well, what do you want me to say about it? After all is said and done, you'll take you own way whether graphologists or bishops say differently. When it comes to a matter of compatibility, I see nothing in either sample of handwriting that would make me say that you are to lead a cat-and-dog life when you get married. It is the other way about with you two. You are both sentimental and rather level-headed. You are the more romantic of the two, though Andrew is still quite able to hold up his end when it comes to talking beautiful nothings in the moonlight. I wouldn't be surprised if you are one of those girls who say, "better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave." Although Andrew is hardly an old man! If that's your idea, it should be O. K.

YOUR CAREER



(Miss Henrietta B., Torrington, Conn.) You impress me as being a girl who is very gentle and delicate. You have not much driving force in your system. You are a hot-house plant, and as a result, you would always have to be careful about overexerting yourself. I think you are in the right field of labor—that of librarian. This is a task that requires lots of research work and attention to details. You have the faculty for getting down to the smallest things, and I'm sure your work would always be well done. There is one tendency, however, in your nature which would be all the better to be watched, and that is your love for "putting off." It is obvious to me that you don't care about buckling down to difficult tasks until you are compelled to do so. As you must be aware, procrastination is a dangerous thing to encourage and binds many an ambitious person hand and foot, in the long run. I see you would always be a conscientious worker and one who could be trusted in any position of responsibility. Altogether, you have a mighty fine chance to succeed in your chosen profession.



(Miss Ruth N., Macon, Ga.) You are a born business woman, and your many splendid qualifications will stand you in good stead as you grow older. I see quickness of perception in your pen strokes. A fine understanding when it comes to problems which require the use of the brain. A desire to have authority which places you in the leader class. A temperament which heightens your personality. All these things are excellent assets from a business point of view. But, after all, you are still a woman. Don't think about yourself entirely in terms of a Napoleon instead of cultivating the Florence Nightingale spirit. There have been many women in the history of the world who have relegated the more feminine side of their natures to the background because of the overwhelming weight of their ambitions and

their undoubted capacities to give something to the world at large; but those of them who entirely dispensed with the true emotional and even domestic side of their natures did not get the most out of life. On the other hand, don't ever let the intelligence and the equipment you have be submerged entirely. You would seem to be a woman who should never be without something to study, something to achieve, something to develop your mind and spiritual perception. Strike a balance, Ruth, and my best wishes go with you.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

a dash of light brown.

(Miss Violet T., Greeley, Col.) I can see at once that you are a temperamental person who never stays in the same mood very long at one time. In point of fact, you are rather hard to get on with, and must have given your mother lots of trouble since you came into the world. I think you have far too much to say most of the time. You are a great talker, and somewhat opinionated. These are some of your bad qualities, but what about the good ones, I hear you ask? Well, to begin with, I discover you have a certain amount of imaginative power which is worth cultivating. Though you are erratic and impulsive you can display tact and diplomacy when you have to. When it comes to thinking out a problem, I would say you are fairly logical in your mental processes. I see nothing materialistic about you. You prefer the better things of life and care nothing for the garish or superficial pleasures of the world. Despite all this, however, you require a little more poise and steadfastness. In the meantime, you are inclined to be too flighty to be really popular.

it very much if

(Miss Jessie O., Boise, Idaho.) You are cast in a large mold. I like your constructive way of thinking. You may not be speedy to comprehend things compared to some people, but when you do give your decision, it is worth listening to. You are very emotional and have a habit of taking offense when any one criticizes you adversely. In other words, you are "touchy" and thin-skinned without having much cause to be so. Moreover, I discover a certain amount of impatience in your make-up. There must be no waiting with you when you require something. I would say that you are unconventional in your tastes. You would always strive to be different from other people in the matter of dress or ideas. You don't conform to new modes or fashions readily. You do your own thinking and wear clothes to suit your own fancy. The best thing about you is your steadfastness of purpose and your honest-to-goodness sincerity. You have much to be thankful for in the way of inherent traits. I would say you are a superior person in many ways.

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Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to inclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

The Man Who "Tells"

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Last February I met my first fellow. I have been brought up very strictly—am twenty now. I didn't know how to act when this fellow began going with me—I felt foolish, and didn't know what to talk about. We went together eight months, and when we had been going together about seven he asked me to marry him. I said yes, 'cause I loved him then, or thought I did. Well, he said he would save up and would give me the diamond for Christmas, as my engagement ring. But about a week after he asked me to marry him he changed. He teased me and teased me and said I didn't love him and he didn't see why I promised to marry him if I didn't want to show my love. He teased until I consented. I'll never forget it as long as I live. I was ashamed to face any one, and I am to this day. He teased me on quite a few times and said, "What does it matter? We're going to be married anyway and nobody will ever know." So I let him 'cause I didn't want him to go away.

Then I heard that he went around with a bunch of fellows and after they stop going with a girl they told about her. The girl who told me said they think it's funny; they laugh among themselves and say everything about a girl. Mrs. Morton, if you don't mind, I'll tell you just what kind of girl I was before. I never swore; I went to church every Sunday, and all the rest of the time I stayed at home and read to my mother. Of course I went to work in the daytime. I still do this, but I swear now, though, I'm trying to get out of the habit. I was just as innocent and dumb as a girl of twelve. He was the one that explained things to me—just think of that. I know it was sin, and I am tortured to death with that sin and the shame of it.

About Labor Day he lost his job and he said he didn't know what to do. I said never mind, the work would come better soon. Then one night I got a letter saying everything against him. It said he wasn't any good, that he went with girls just to spoil them. It said if they were me they would give him up—oh, it was an awful letter. And I am sure that he was the one that wrote it. I could tell his writing, though he tried to make it look different. And it was signed "From a Friend." I cried and cried over that letter, and when he came I could tell he was guilty of it. He asked me what was the matter and I said, "Nothing." And he said there must be, and had anything happened. I broke out crying. I turned my head from him and just

as I turned around I caught him smiling; then he tried to put on a sober face. I was afraid to give him up because I knew he would go and tell. I showed him the letter and he said it must be a girl he'd gone with before that wrote it. I told him the writing looked familiar, and he asked if I was going to give him up and I said no. He used me worse than ever—would hardly speak to me, and made believe he was tired and sleepy every time he came up. He would always sit a distance from me on the divan.

About a week after that he said he was going to join the Marines and I was glad. I thought I'd never see him again, nor anybody else see him either. Well, we said good-by. He didn't go. He is still living in the city where I work. (I travel back and forth. There is no work in this little town for me.) I called him up one day and asked him to come back, but he said he has another girl. So now I am waiting for the news to spread. He promised me he wouldn't tell, but I am afraid. What would you do, Mrs. Morton, if any one should come up and say what they heard about you? My sister wants me to go out with her and her boy friend and a friend of his, but I am ashamed to go. I hide myself in the house. I've never had a good time, and I'd like to go out with them, but suppose they heard what sort of girl I am? There's another nice fellow that has asked me to go out with him, too, but I am afraid. If he ever heard that about me I'd die, I guess. So now, Mrs. Morton, I've told you my story. I had to tell somebody. Now can you tell me what to do and what not to do? I'd hate to have my friends know I was so weak. For goodness' sake, tell me what to say if they speak of it. HEARTBROKEN NORA.

What should you do, Nora? Deny it, of course. Your word is as good as his. He has nothing on you. Dear, when we have done wrong or made a mistake, the experience is not all a loss. We can learn by it not to do the same wrong, to make the same mistake again. It seems to me that the least a fellow could do would be to respect a girl's confidence and trust, but that kind never do. I hate to use the word "man" to describe such a person, for he is not a man in any sense of the word. But all you need do, if the subject comes up, is to say that *you* found out what sort of fellow *he* is, and kicked him out of your life.

Go out with the others, Nora. Try to put this thing in the back of your mind and forget it, so far as you can. Learn from it how little dependence you can place on the word of such fellows, and never trust one again, but don't sit at home and brood and worry over it! You can live down this thing and be a good and worth-while woman yet, with a little more sympathy and understanding, perhaps, than you might otherwise have had for those who go astray and fall. If any one hears that about you all you need say is that it isn't true—and I hope you have not destroyed his letter, for you could even show it to your friends, if the occasion arises, and say it was what showed him up to you. This would be just what he deserves—to be "hoist with his own petard."

Have a good time with your other friends; try to live a normal, happy life, with the right sort of recreation and play to keep you from getting morbid and lonely. And put this experience back into the past where it belongs. Try to live as if it had never happened, except for the lesson it has taught you. And when you really fall in love and have the right sort of lover, you need not tell him everything you know. It is most unlikely that he will tell you everything *he* knows!

You think, perhaps, that nothing could be worse than your experience. There is nothing so bad that it couldn't be worse. Read the next letter:

Must She Confess?

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I don't know what you will think of me when you read this letter, but I've got to tell some one and you seem to help so many girls in small troubles that perhaps you can help me with my great one. I'll have to begin a long time ago. My father and mother died when I was a tiny girl and my grandmother brought me up. I can look back now and see that she was a good woman, but she did not understand children and she made my sis and me very unhappy. I was the older. I was a big, strong girl for my age—by the time I was twelve I looked sixteen or seventeen, and I thought I should have the privileges of a seventeen-year-old girl. Boys wanted to go with me, but gran would not let me have

them at the house, so I had to meet them on the sly. Finally I ran away from home. I went to St. Louis and got a job in a store, and I took up with a wild crowd. We used to pride ourselves on being the fastest crowd in town. The girls' philosophy was that they were at liberty to do just what men did; we smoked, drank, swore, stayed out till all hours; nothing stopped us. Oh, we thought we were a wise bunch, and we bragged about what we did. No one there knew how old I was—I told them I was almost twenty, and could get away with it.

But I wasn't so wise as I flattered myself. When I was a little past fourteen I found I was going to have a baby. That tamed me down some. My whole nature seemed to change. I didn't feel like racketing around any more. It wasn't only that I didn't feel well physically—my whole mind, my whole outlook on life was changed. I kept remembering all the things my gran had preached at us about the "wages of sin," and how you can't fool justice—it always catches up with you, sooner or later. After all, that isn't preaching; it's just common sense. I went to my boss at the store, finally. She was a human being. She made arrangements for me to go to one of the Florence Crittenton homes. They were good to us there; they did not treat us like outcasts or criminals. I learned to be a stenographer while I was waiting. And I began to think and plan for the poor little baby. I thought how, if it was a girl, I would bring her up right, as far as I could—not be too strict with her, nor yet too loose, but try to teach her to like the right things and have the right sort of good times. And if it was a boy I'd try to help him, too, so he wouldn't grow up and be cheap, like the men I'd known. I saw the other girls with their little nameless children—they keep you there until the baby's six months old, if you want to stay—and I longed for my own. I thought I'd have saved something out of the wreck of my own life, and perhaps, if I brought the baby up to be a good man or woman God would forgive me some day. The baby came—and lived eighteen hours. Perhaps it was better. The doctor and the nurse tried to tell me so, but I couldn't see it at the time. What little of the old spirit was left in me was tamed down finally then.

Gran was dead by that time, and I came back to my home town and my sis and I kept house together and went to business. We have a lot of nice friends, and she is married now and very happy. Then I met a wonderful man myself, the kind of man the sun rises and sets in. I can't begin to tell you how I love him. I'm almost twenty-four now. All that time in St. Louis seems like something that happened to somebody else. And when he loved me, and asked me to be his wife, I thought that there was going to be heaven on earth for me, after all. I have my trousseau all ready; the date is set for February.

And then this last month the man I used to go with—my baby's father—came here. He came to see me, and first he wanted me to live with him again; then when he found I was engaged he said I must marry him instead. I said I'd never marry him, if I had to live alone all my life. He got ugly and told me he'd tell Arthur (my fiancé) unless I would let him come whenever he wanted to, and do whatever he liked. I have been kidding him along a little—I didn't know what else to do. But he is getting harder and harder to manage, and he says he positively will tell before long. I just can't bear him, Mrs. Morton. Yet Arthur is not the kind of man who would understand—if any of them would. He is so upright, so good himself, that he cannot conceive of any one with decent instincts going wrong. He would never forgive me. He had a brother who got a girl into trouble, and he never mentions his name. I have seen him turn white to the lips when some one brought up the subject. I thought that I had paid in full before, but I guess I haven't. Only why should *I* do all the paying? That man was as bad as I was and has never suffered at all. What can I do? What shall I do? What is the way out? Please don't publish my name nor the place. I will sign myself

TAMED DOWN.

My dear, if this were an ordinary case I would say to you, just as I did to Nora, "Don't tell. Your word is as good as his." But this is not an ordinary case. The creature who has arisen out of your past to blackmail you changes all possibility of concealment. It is not that I believe it right to deceive the person who loves us, but for Arthur's own sake it would be better for him not to know—it would make him too unhappy. However, since this man—no, we can't call him a man. Let us refer to him as "this rat," although, come to think of it, I don't know why we should use the name of a poor dumb animal for any one so low as that. The animal doesn't know any better; a human being is supposed to. However, since this rat will tell him anyway, you will have to tell him first yourself. That will be better than to have him hear it from some one else. You see, Tamed Down, in this case your word is not as good as the rat's, for he could bring too many witnesses, too much proof, of the truth of what he has to say. If you denied it and then it was proved against you, you would be worse off than you are now, or than you would be if you made a frank confession of your own accord.

On no condition should you give in to him now. Don't even think of it. That would only give him more to tell, more to brag about. And when would *that* end? Go to your fiancé; offer to break the engagement; say that you know he will not forgive you for something that happened to you, although it was ten whole years ago. And if he leaves you, child, you will have to make up your mind to live without him. You will have to cultivate a few sour grapes and try to believe that a man so bigoted on that one subject would be narrow and bigoted on others, too, a hard man to live with, a hard man to live up to. He is indeed ignorant of life, lacking in human sympathy if knowing you as he must know you now, and with a record of ten worth-while years behind you, he could not condone something you did when you were a little ignorant girl.

As for the rat, he will not go scot-free forever—don't think it. The lagging foot of Justice will catch up with him some day, too. And just to *be* the kind of person he is; to live in the world and learn nothing; to have such a perverted mind, is part of his punishment. He can know no real joy, no true happiness, because he is incapable of appreciating them.

I have published your letter, Tamed Down, not only because it may help some other girl to go straight when she is tempted, but because I hope it will help mothers and grandmothers, and all those who have the charge of young girls, too. Oh, if they would only understand that denying youth its wholesome recreations leads to deceit, teaches girls to lie and conceal even the perfectly innocent things they do.

Overstrictness on the part of a parent or guardian never does any good. It only kills that beautiful confidence that might exist between the older person and the younger one. And too, too often, as in your case, it brings about the very thing it was striving to avoid.

Whose Gods Shall She Follow?

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am half American and half Chinese, I look like an American girl, but was brought up like Chinese; I believe that I can speak Chinese better than American. I take after my mother, who died three years ago, and my brother looks Chinese like father. Father is a dear; he is awfully good to me. I am eighteen years of age and go with a nice Chinese boy whom I love dearly, and he loves me and wants me to marry him. I am pretty and quite wealthy, but my boy friend, Hi Chiang, comes from a very good family and is not terribly poor. I told father about Hi Chiang and me and he said, "You are too young to get married. Stop this nonsense. Be just good friends—twenty-four will be time enough for you to marry." But I think that father doesn't want to lose me. Twenty-four is quite a long time.

What do you think? Do you think it's wrong for a girl who looks American to marry a Chinese boy? I know my dear father would rather have me go with a Chinese than with any American. And Hi Chiang is awfully good to me and treats me better than any American boy I know or have gone with. Father had a good talk with him, and so instead of being sweethearts we are just real friends. Do you think this is best? We did not wish to run away and get married without our parents' consent. I understand Chinese customs better than American customs. I don't know myself if I'm doing right, a girl that looks American following after Chinese customs. My country is China, and we'll probably go back there in three years to stay forever. Do you think I'm doing right? Please tell me. I shall be very grateful.

CONNIE.

Yes, Connie, I feel that you are doing absolutely right. Did you read "Mr. and Mrs. Sen," and its sequel, about the children of that international marriage? The one who looked "American" was Chinese by nature, and the one who looked Chinese was American—or, rather, in that case, English—by nature. It is obvious that your Chinese instincts have a stronger hold on you, and I certainly would not advise you to try to kill your affection for a worthy young man of your

father's race. However, your father is right, too, Connie—right, and very wise. It will not hurt either of you two youngsters to wait and be a little older and a little surer of yourselves before you take the big step of marriage. If he intends to take you back to China, it is probable that the life there will absorb you, as it has a way of doing, and you will forget all about this country you have temporarily adopted. Good luck, and happy days, Connie. I wish you would let some of my girls write to you. I know that they would find you a very interesting person.

Clive—I regret that any young man should write me such a letter, and show himself so easily influenced, so vacillating. Your sweetheart sounds true blue to me, and the people who have run her down to you sound false. It is absurd to say that you won't be "kidded by any skirt," for you have not the slightest vestige of proof that she was kidding you. I have a feeling that she is crying her eyes out now because of your treatment. If any one is kidding you, Clive, it is the so-called friends. They are as false to you as they are to her, or they would not have tried to spoil your happiness. Go back to her and tell her that you're sorry.

Emeline of Jersey—Come around again in three or four years and I'll answer your question. Meanwhile, be a good girl and study your lessons.

Reader's Choice Coupon

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free an original illustration in this issue. Just inclose five coupons in your letter and a drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

A Christmas Wooing.....

The Love He Scorned.....

Castaway at Christmas.....

Twice Promised .....

Her Other Love.....

A Legacy of Hate.....

Jilted .....

Her Rival From Paris.....

"Little Lost Sweetheart".....

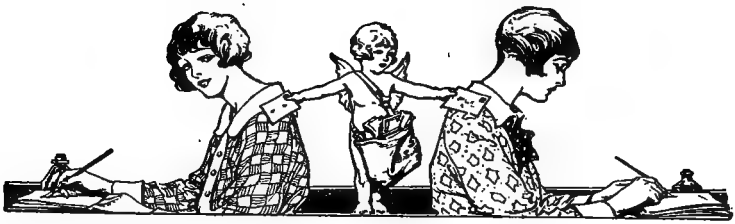
The River of Love.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)



The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope, send it to Mrs. Dale, and she will forward it for you. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask Mrs. Dale for the address of any one, but you must of course sign your letter in full so that the answer can come direct to you.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I have just finished my first copy of ALL-STORY, and like it better than any other magazine I have ever read. I think the Lonesome Club is just the thing. I'm seventeen, jet-black hair, black eyes, dark skin. I live in a city where an Indian institute is located, and am often taken for an Indian. I have lots of friends, but all are here and I love to write letters. Yes, I want to hear from all of you. I'll answer every one the day received. TILLIE.

I'd love to hear from people from the "Great West." I don't know why, but I love the West. I love all sports—cook, sew, draw, etc. People in my town wonder what I don't love. I went to high school, business college, and in April am going in training to be a nurse. In my spare time I read ALL-STORY. Boy, I sure make time to read them. NEW YORK SMILES.

Whoopee! Here I am, all ready for the mailman. I'm a boy of seventeen, five feet six, brown hair and black eyes. I'm a great lover of sports, including skiing, swimming, skating, and am an accomplished dancer. I play the banjo, uke and guitar, and sing bass in the choir. I'm interested in aviation and have been up several times, so, dear pen pals, I'll have plenty to tell you.

ME FOR FUN.

There is nothing I'd love better than oodles of pen pals, so to you I come for help. Guess my looks won't make any difference, but here goes: five feet two, blue eyes, blond hair, and my age—can you guess? To the one that comes nearest I will send a souvenir.

LENA DARLING.

Hey! I'd like to hear from anybody, everybody, anywhere, everywhere. I'm dark complexioned, brown hair, five feet four, weigh 130, not real fat, but firm. I enjoy all kinds of sports, horse riding most of all. Come on, gang, give me a letter shower, age between fifteen and nineteen. ARKIE FROM ARKANSAS.

Dear pals, all of you, please write to me! I'd like to write to any between eighteen and twenty-five. I'm twenty, not very tall, brown hair and eyes. I'm taking up law, but don't think I'm half as serious-minded as this would imply. I'm fond of tennis and dancing. Come on, you fellows, get busy.

M. E. B. OF SOUTH AFRICA. *(5c postage)*

A blue-eyed blonde, seventeen. Mrs. Dale, can you find me a pal that can tell me about the South Sea Islands? Every book I can get about the South Seas I read, and like.

SALLY OF W. A.

I'd like to write to every one from somewhere and everywhere, especially France, Spain and Scotland. I love music, reading and, best of all, letter writing. If you wish to know more about me write to MYSTERIOUS DOT.

I'm sixteen, blue eyes, dark blond hair, very fond of swimming, dancing and writing letters. I'm very much interested in dramatic art, and hope some day to be able to go on the stage.
JUST A UTAH GIRL.

I'm five feet four, blue eyes, curly brown hair. I'm Irish and look it. Can I dance? And how! I like all sports, play a uke like one possessed of Old Nick. I'm seventeen and free from any cares. I'll answer any and all letters, and if there aren't enough to push the lid off my mail box I'll be disappointed. Come on, you hoboes, and do your pen acts
SHORTY FROM WYOMING.

I'm an English girl of nineteen, five feet two, blond hair, fair complexion. Next to receiving letters I like dancing, motoring, horse riding and music. I play the piano, like to dream of lovers canoeing, crooning love songs and strumming on their guitars in Hawaii. ANXIOUS BLONDE.

I'm a girl of fourteen, red hair, brown eyes and very small lips. I weigh 94, am five feet three, and have the Ragged-Ann—windblown bob. I have many nice friends, but want pen pals from fourteen to eighteen. My hobbies are motoring, writing, dancing and the movies. I want to be a stage actress or a screen actress. Come on, girls, make my mailman earn his pay. I live in a small town in central Florida.
RED MILLER.

Here's another lonely chap, eighteen, six feet tall, black wavy hair and black eyes. Like all kinds of sports, also dancing. I have been hurt recently and that's the reason I long for pen pals. Most of my friends call me SPIKE.

I'm a little girl, five feet, two eyes of blue, age nineteen, brown hair, windblown bob. Some of my friends say I'm good-looking. I don't think so, but if you want to find out just write to LITTLE LIL OF GLENS FALLS.

Does any one care to write to a Minnesota girl? We are roommates in a sanitarium. Don't think we're dull just because we aren't in the run with you folks. Patsy is five feet two, black hair and gray-green eyes. She'd like to hear from people between twenty and thirty who live in Canada and the Far Western States. She's twenty-one. Peggy is five feet seven, dark brown hair and dark blue-gray eyes. She is twenty and would like to hear from people between twenty and thirty who live in the southwestern States, Mexico, Hawaii and Alaska. Come on, folks! We're waiting. Send your snap and we'll send ours. Choose either— PATSY OR PEGGY.

I'm a peppy gal of eighteen, dark brown hair and brown eyes. Five feet five, weight 128. I have some wonderful times here in old Mount Vernon and would like to hear from a big-city girl that has lots of fun, too. I love swimming and dancing and parties, but above all good sportsmanship. So here's to the good sports—may I hear from them all! Mrs. Dale, you are a life saver. BETTY H.

I'm a lonesome girl of seventeen, five feet five, large green eyes and reddish-brown hair. I'm considered very good-looking. I love sports such as hiking, tobogganing and ice skating. I'm a stenographer, but am working at home at present. My brother has been dead for seven years and I'm very lonesome. Please won't some one write to me in a hurry? I promise snappy letters promptly. My name is Ethel, but a lot of friends call me HIGH TEST.

I've never, never had a pen pal in all my fifteen years. I have blond hair, blue eyes, and spend my mornings in high school, so I have all afternoon to write to you all. I'll take letters from any one, any place, and of any age. Am I being too particular? ETH, N. Y.

Since reading the friendly letters in the department I've determined to find out if some girl who lives on a cattle ranch out West would be so kind as to become a pen pal to me? I'm a sophomore in high school, fifteen years old.
BUN OF ILLINOIS.

Wanted Pen Pals: I'm a young woman of thirty, five feet three, weigh 120, auburn curly hair, blue eyes, and a smile for every one. I am Irish, French and German descent. I have been married, but lost my husband and my home and I am in a strange city, so get very lonesome. I love to dance, skate, play cards, go to ball games, horse races, auto races, and shows.
CHICAGO BABE.

I'm a married man of twenty-seven, and would like to have some other man write to me. I like fishing, picture shows, watch people play tennis, horse shows, aircraft and baseball.
BUDDY OF KANSAS.

I have lots of friends, but love writing letters. I'm fifteen, five feet three, wavy black hair and brown eyes. I love sports, especially dancing, and will exchange photographs with any one. Come on, everybody, for further information write to
ROSE MARIE.

I am a girl of seventeen, five feet four, brown hair and eyes. Love dancing, swimming, tennis, skating, golf and all other sports. I promise to write to anybody, and exchange photos.
GIGGLES OF MAINE.

Who am I? Just a stenographer and abstracter, and writing letters all day does not dull my interest in writing to any one who will answer this appeal. I am Irish and live in the "State where the tall corn grows," and I would like to hear from refined girls who earn their own living. So dust off your pens and write to
MADAME X.

I am a young married girl of nineteen, five feet five, dark brown hair and blue eyes. I have a little girl five months old. My husband is in such work that we have to move around a good deal. I'd love to hear from girls near my age.

LONESOME MARTHA.

Just a lonely Marine, longing for pen pals. I've been on all the oceanic waters and seas and can relate many thrilling adventures. I'm nineteen, six feet, weight 170, blond hair, deep blue eyes.

WHITIE.

I am an Hawaiian Islander, twenty-two, five feet seven, brown in complexion, weigh 145. I am so lonesome that I haven't any friend. Friends in Hawaii do not satisfy me; I want to communicate with some in your States or any other part. I am working now, but day after day I can't get contented. Please let me hear from some of your correspondents.

HAWAIIAN-BORN. *(2c postage)*

Of the many readers of this there must be some who feel as lonely as I do, and will write and exchange snaps. I'm five feet seven, blue eyes, black hair, ruddy complexion, considered good-looking. Please print this letter as I am dying to see what the results will be.

RAYMOND OF THE F. A.

I'm a blonde, blue eyes, seventeen and a half. I love to read, go horseback riding, play tennis, go to the movies and football games. I can play the piano, too, and also like swimming. I'd like to hear from girls out West, East, South and North.

LINNEA.

Is there any one that cares to write to a girl that doesn't make any particular sport her hobby, but skates a little, dances a little, swims a little, and is keen on tramping, rowing, fishing, and driving a car? I'm a blonde *by nature*, blue eyes, and several years over my twenty-first birthday. Will answer any letters Uncle Sam's mailman hands me. Let's hope there are quite a few.

ALONE.

S O S, Pen Pals! I'm sending a plea for letters from all over the world. I am twenty, with dark hair and eyes, and rather tall. I like to swim and go riding in the evenings, or to a movie. I'm also interested in art.

JOHN OF JERSEY.

I'm a girl sixteen, dark eyes and hair, five feet four, love all outdoor sports, especially horseback riding.

HONEY OF N. H.

Lonesome, fifteen, five feet eight, medium brown wavy hair, hazel eyes. I love all sports and dancing, and would like letters from every one from everywhere.

HELEN OF THE WINDY CITY.

I'd like to get pen pals from all parts of the world. I have relatives in several countries, but hardly ever hear from them. I am a junior in the State university and can tell you all about college life. A Jewish girl of eighteen, quite tall and slender, olive complexion, dark eyes and blond hair. Come on and write to a very impatient person called

RAI.

I'm rather lonely at times and although I have many friends here, I have never had any friends to write to. I'll soon be nineteen years of age, am rather tall and slender, have dark brown eyes and blond hair. I'm always ready for a good time and as the State university is located here, we have plenty of dances and parties and other good times. I'll be glad to hear from every one, answer all letters and send "snaps."

S. C. OF INDIANA.

I was born in France, am eighteen, can speak French, English and Indian. Am five feet one, black eyes, black hair, and am a good sport and friend. My hobby is collecting pictures, so, pen pals, please send me yours.

BOOTS OF WASHINGTON.

Let's get acquainted, everybody! I live in a bold bad town, but I'm not like that. I'm eighteen, five feet five, not exactly homely. I'm crazy about the West and will be tickled to death to hear from any one out there, and I'll give you the low-down on Chi. I love a good time and all kinds of sports, including "good sports." I'm waiting for your letters and then I'll tell you a lot more.

MARY OF CHICAGO.

I find every issue of ALL-STORY more interesting than the last. Although I do considerable reading I am very lonesome. You see, I am from the country, but now live in the city, and it is so different in all respects. I cannot seem to grasp the city routine hubbub. I am a girl of twenty-two, brown hair and eyes, not pretty but attractive, as I understand. Love all outdoor sports, also movies and dancing. Some one who likes the country, or those who can tell me how to get acquainted with city life, please write. Are you interested?

BOBBIE FROM CONN.

I have some pals, yet am lonely for more. I am a young married fellow, lonesome to hear from other young married fellows, or single ones, too. I love to write letters and make new friends. I'm a movie fan, also a sport of all kinds, have a knack at all kinds of trades; like gardening, mostly flowers. I am twenty-eight, tall, thin, dark hair and eyes.

TOM OF N. J.

Hello, every one, here comes another lonely fellow looking for some one to cheer him up. How about it, fellows? I'm twenty-five, five feet eight, slender lithe build, dark brown hair parted in the center, dark brown eyes, and wear glasses. Am interested in science and inventions, aviation and correspondence. Wonder how many of you fellows will send me a snappy, cheerful letter. All will certainly be answered.

LINDY.

I have loads of friends, but would like some new ones. Come on, old and young, write to me.

They call me the World's Wonder. Now won't you want to know why? Write to me and I'll tell you. I have a mop of black curly hair, large dark eyes, a pug nose, and am brown of skin. I have a good figure. I love music of all kinds, take piano lessons, and am also a good dancer. Have been on the stage several times. If a modern person wrote to me I would act as a modern girl, but I can also act old-fashioned. I know how to ride a horse, swim, canoe, tennis, baseball, kickball, etc. As a girl scout I can climb and make knots. Come on, let's be pals. The first one gets a souvenir of my town.

WORLD'S WONDER OF N. J.

Here is another letter for your splendid club! I want loads of correspondents, so roll up, everybody, and hurry and write to some one from 'way down in the Antipodes. I am five feet two, with nearly black hair, green eyes, and am at high school age—fourteen. I love books and am fond of swimming and other sports. I'll try to answer all letters and anybody from fourteen to sixteen is welcome, only *please* write soon. Call me

NEW ZEALAND MARION. *(5c postage)*

I do not know whether this is out of the sphere of your correspondence—I hope not, as I am most desirous of hearing from American girls. I am nineteen, not very tall, gray eyes and mid-brown hair. I play the violin, am very fond of tennis, and read a good deal. I will be very pleased to answer any letters sent me and will be on tiptoe with expectation until my mail comes. Hoping for American letters,

A GIRL OF AUSTRALIA.

Won't some young people take pity on a girl and write to her? I have medium brown hair, blue eyes, light complexion, four and a half feet tall. OPERATOR CARRIE.

Just an ordinary girl looking for pen pals. I am thirteen, five feet six, weigh 120. I am full of fun, have reddish-brown hair and blue eyes. I'd like to hear from everybody all over the whole wide world. A BOSTONIAN.

You don't know how much I like to read and write. I'm a sophomore in high school, and tall—boy, I'm five feet seven, weigh 125, am dark, with blue eyes. I want pals of all ages and solemnly promise to exchange snapshots and answer all who write. I almost forgot the most important part of all—I like all kinds of sports, dancing, swimming, reading and driving my father's car, and the latest is miniature golf. My pen name shall be my nickname, GERT, VERMONT.

I am five feet two, slim, dark blue eyes, long, curly eyelashes and brows, reddish-brown curly hair. Love to dance, ride horseback, and swim. Come on, everybody, please write to me—a snapshot to the first that writes.

CURLY-HEADED BABY.

I am a young married woman living in West Virginia. I want oodles of pen pals. Won't some of your club write to me? I will be sure to answer your letters.

PAL FROM WEST VIRGINIA.

I'm a little lonesome girl who'd like some real pen friends. I am thirteen, wavy brown hair and brown eyes, love all kinds of sports, love to write. Get ready, everybody, and write to me. Will exchange snapshots.

LONESOME BROWN EYES FROM OKLAHOMA.

I'm looking for some pen pals, too, and so I'd like to hear from you who read this little note of mine, so hurry on and send that line to me. No matter where you're from, your letters will be most welcome. My age is twenty-three, and you'll find that, as for me, I just won't mind how old *you* are. I love to write and sew (?) I'm at it every night. Reading's also in my line—there really isn't enough time for all the things I like to do. If I've roused interest in you, just write. I've lots more news to tell. I'm certain we would get on well. About yourself, tell all you can; on lengthy letters I've no ban. I'm from Chicago. You've all the "info" you need. Write now—please don't be slow. "AH MEE."

I'd like to make new friends, especially those that like to write nice *long* letters. I'm sixteen, brown hair, hazel eyes, five feet three. Any one, no matter what age or anything, will receive as interesting a letter as I can possibly make it if they write to me. I'm a lover of all outdoor sports, especially swimming, and my favorite indoor sport is dancing. And how! Please, every one take a piece of paper and a pencil and write to me. I'd like a snapshot in your first letter.

HELEN FROM SAN FRANCISCO.

I'm nineteen, five feet two, dark brown hair, gray blue eyes, a smile for everybody. I've been told that I'm very pretty, but of course I don't believe it. I play tennis, just love to swim, and would rather dance than eat. I play the piano and banjo and am studying art, too. I love to cook and keep house—why, I even burned the cake I baked this morning.

STELLA OF ST. LOUIS.

What To Do With a Picture

I am starting a friendship album and would like to receive pictures of people from all over the world between ten and one hundred. Please, all you readers send me a photo for my album, with your name and address on the back. I'll tell you something about myself—sweet sixteen (never been kissed), dark blue eyes, dark brown hair, medium complexion. My hobbies are collecting poems and photographs, writing letters and searching for adventure. My motto is "Why be good?" I have a horror of old maids, striped eyes, and freckles. My greatest fault is my temper—that has fourteen rattles and a button. No kiddin'! I'm interested in all sports, movies, dancing, riding horses—oh, just anything you're interested in. Let's go! I'm also collecting souvenirs and to every one who sends me one I'll send one in return. CYCLONE IN DIXIE.

I wonder if you could find a bonza pen pal for a lonely lass of seventeen, away over here in sunny Australia. I'm five feet five, gray eyes, golden-brown curly hair. I'm very musical, love horseback riding, reading, and enjoy long tramps. I'd like very much to find a friend in one of your big towns who could tell me of its amusements and wonders; also of the American graduate's life, as I live back in the hills where even a picture show is the greatest novelty. Hurry, some of you peppy girls, and write me of the wonderful times you have..

'UNNY OF AUSSIE. *(5c postage)*

I live in a beautiful place, so shouldn't complain, as I possess the best of health, although I'm working inside all the time. I enjoy all outdoor sports, all kinds of music, and am very fond of horses. In spite of my age, twenty-eight, I am no old maid (or widow). I intend to get everything out of life that's coming my way, and don't envy others because fortune has smiled upon them. I lean slightly toward the Latin race and would prefer hearing from some of them, or Indian. Letters from anywhere and any one, however, will be appreciated. My hair is black, eyes, dark gray, medium complexion, five feet five.

GIRL OF MIDDLE WEST.

I am not Chinese, but Chin-Chin-Chinaman is where I come from. I'm a girl of eighteen, five feet two, eyes of gray-blue, chestnut hair, weigh 101, love to receive letters. Please find me some pen pals and I promise to write them all about China. I adore all kinds of sports, such as football, hockey, basket ball, tennis, dancing, and excitement, which we get here quite often when the Chinese strike breaks forth. I'll be only too glad to tell you all about the different places I've been.

TAM OF CHINA. *(5c postage)*

I am a redhead, five feet six, not so good for looks, but manage to get along. I love travel and do a great deal of it. Sometimes I work my way and sometimes I am a passenger. Don't stop any of the pals from writing.

LLOYD IN CALIFORNIA.

I'm a twenty-five-year-old Jewish girl
Pals I want by galore.
I'm lonesome during office hours;
Pen pals, I want you all.
I'll write you all you want to know,
And then some more news, too—
Of dancing, singing, and of sports;
My good times are not few.
Now, Jewish girls, just give me a try,
For I am sure I'll satisfy.

CHICAGO MINNIE.

I bet you'll be surprised to hear from a girl of twelve, 'cause most of your girls are much older. I'm four feet ten, with blond hair, all different colors, blue eyes, brown eyebrows and lashes. I've got a windblown bob, but I wear it slick 'cause it gets all tumbly over my head. I love to write letters, but more to receive them. I adore swimming and basket ball, and I play baseball once in a while. I've got loads of friends, but I want pen friends, too, and I'll try to make my letters interesting to all who write to

LITTLE ME, Rochester.

I'm sixteen, blue eyes, fair complexion, light hair, five feet three. I'll answer pen pals from all over the world and exchange snaps. I'm a lover of all outdoor sports, also of reading. All of you please write to

FAYE OF ALABAM.

I'm a young married woman of twenty-two, Scotch descent. I have auburn hair, blue eyes, very fair complexion, five feet two, weigh 98. I have two little daughters, one three years and the other ten months, and when I get them tucked into their little beds at night I long for some pals to write to.

MARION OF JAMAICA.

Would some one like to hear from a lonesome little girl of seventeen, a wife of more than two years, and a dreamer? If you would like to hear more, please write.

MARIA OF THE TROPICS.

I'm five feet seven, slim, dark blue eyes, black long curly eyelashes, reddish-brown curly hair. Love to dance, ride horseback, and music. A snapshot to the first one that writes to

CURLY-HEADED BABY.

I'm a young married woman living in West Virginia. I want oodles of pen pals. Won't some of you write to me? I'll be sure to answer all.

PAL OF WEST VIRGINIA.

I happened to find your club in ALL-STORY and all my thoughts of studying went straight out of the window. Honestly, it's the most beautiful idea I've ever heard of, and if all the people are half as precious as their letters sound they must be just perfect pen pals. Oh, please, all of you, put just two minutes aside and write me letters. I'll try to make it worth while, and will be glad to exchange pictures with anybody. I'm not really lonesome, but hope you'll let me join your club anyway, and please write right away!

CHRISTMAS CAROL.

We are two sisters from Yugoslavia, not far from the city Fiume belonging to Italy. In America five years in May. One, married, is twenty-eight, four feet two; other, single, is twenty-two, five feet three, and fair appearance. We would like to hear from girls, both single and married, who are willing to correspond with us in learning English. We join the Lonesome Club for first time and hope we make the friends!

OLDER AND YOUNGER.

Could I have some pen pals before I get lonesome? I have big brown eyes, brown wavy hair, and am fifteen years old. I toe dance and tap, and love all sports. I promise to be prompt.

BROWNIE FROM IOWA.